

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす(TENKY)

ホーランド・ゾンビ 境界線上の ゾンビシン

GENESIS シリーズ

きみとあさまで

III
上



特-5

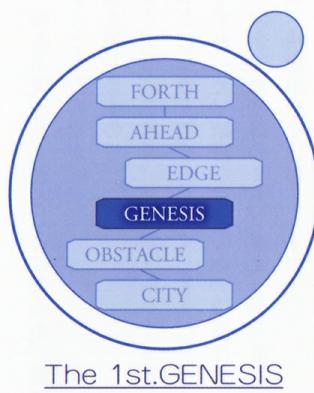


GENESISシリーズ 境界線上のホライゾン
きみとあさまで III(上)
川上 稔

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特典文庫

BCXA
0411



The 1st.GENESIS

NOT FOR SALE



かわいみ みのる
川上 稔

1975年1月3日生まれ。東京出身。先日受けた健康診断の結果はオールAだったとのこと。「規則正しい生活送ってますから」とは本人の談だが……何かがおかしいと思わずにはいられない。

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イラスト:さとやす(TENKY)

山形生まれの栃木育ち「ところでんは酸っぱおいしい。バッタのやつは水切りをしっかりしたい」あれ食ってる間に染み出でますよねー。

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カバー／旭印刷

『浅間のとも達』

浅間は、脱衣場の時計と目の前に吊されている制服二枚を比べ、こう思った。

……どー考えても制限時間内に乾きませんねコレ。

脱衣場には除湿の機器と加護が入っている。普通の制服なら、これで充分に乾く筈だが、この二人の制服にも、最近はいろいろな加護を入れているのを失念していた。

「いつものトーリ君の女装用制服を干しているのとは違うんでした……」

自分仕様と同等の扱いにしておくべきだった。

ただ、時計と、今からの乾燥時間を見るに、

「喜美、ミト、制服はここに置いておいて、先に御飯にしちゃいましょう。終わつたあたりで乾いてると思いますから」

「え？ あ、そうなんですか？」私、てっきりここでの飲酒が今日の朝食代わりになるのかと思つていたんですね」

「……うちはどういう家ですか」

泉の方では水を零す音がする。覗くように見れば、喜美が立ち上がりて身体の立体や髪から水の流れを下らせているところだ。彼女は、胸を沿つて落ちる滴を手指で受け止めつつ、泉の縁に腰掛けているミトツダイラを顎で示した。

「だつたら浅間、早めに行きましょ？ ミトツダイラが瓶使いたくてうずうずしてるわ」

「してません！ してませんわよ!?」

はいはい、と頷きながら、浅間は脱衣場の棚から浴衣を出す。

一枚しかなかった。一応、籠の中には自分が着てきた浴衣があるが、現状の人数は三人。浴衣は合計で二枚だ。浅間は、その事実を確認し、

「おおう」

結局、話し合いの末、ある手段がとられることになった。最初は浅間が先に母屋に戻つて、追加の一枚をとつてこようとしたのだが、

「喜美と二人でここに私を残しますの!?」

却下になつた。仕方なく、浴衣二枚を、浅間がミトツダイラと二人で背中合わせに半々ずつ着て、間に喜美が入ることにした。前を合わせてしまえば、そこそ形になる。

ほとんど隠し芸状態ですね、と、結構な密度の中で浅間は思い、母屋までを歩き出す。歩幅があるため、後ろ向きで最後尾のミトツダイラが大変だ。が、距離半ばのあたりで、

「あ、二人とも御免、私、我慢出来ないわ……！」

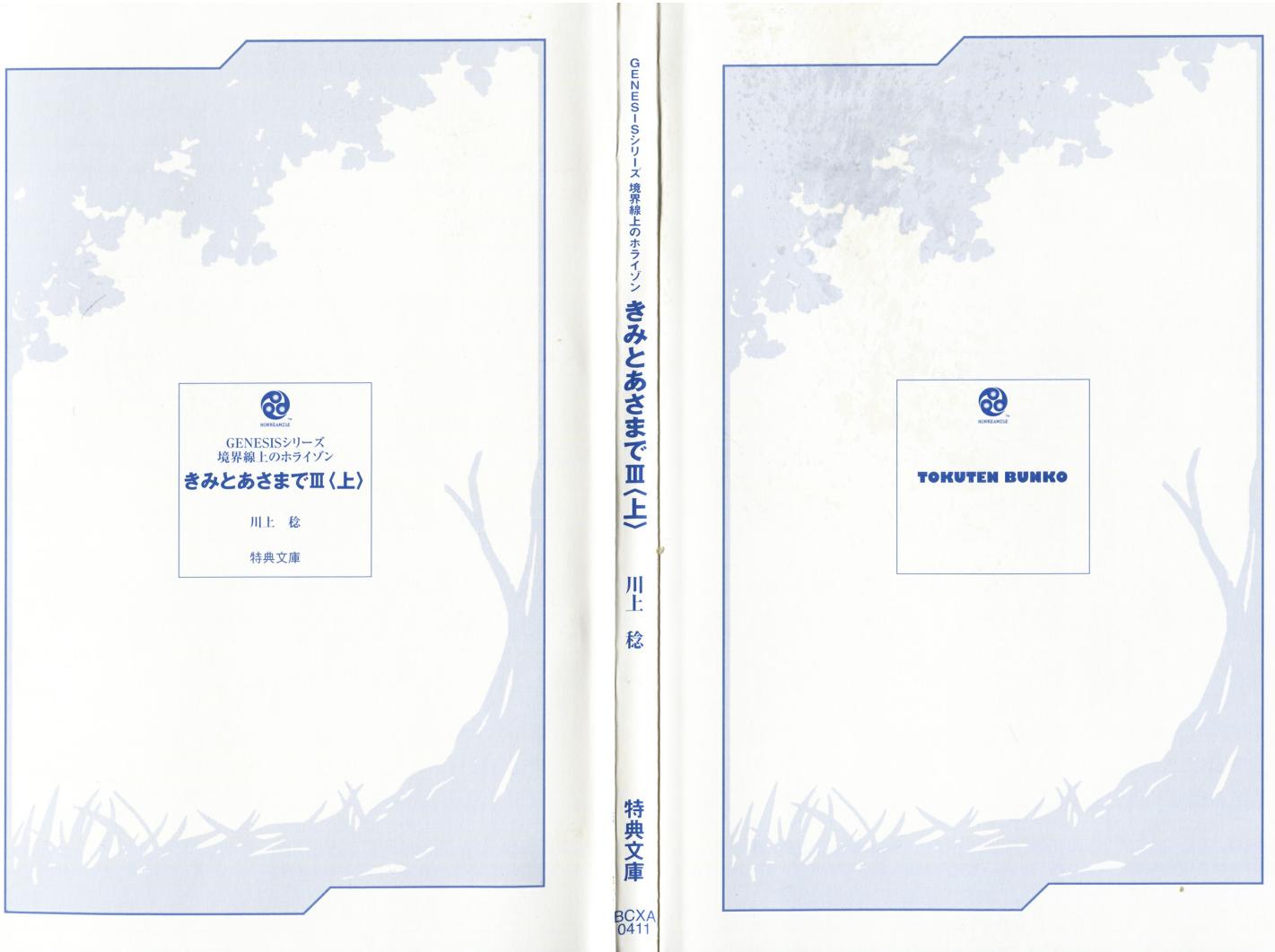
喜美が、こちらとミトツダイラの尻をいきなり触つてきた。それも谷間に指差し込みで。

ひやあ、と声をあげて腰を後ろに振つて拒否すれば、ミトツダイラも同じ事をしたらしい。

満面笑顔の喜美と、落ちる浴衣二枚を残して、反動で浅間はミトツダイラと外に転がつた。

inside story

inside story



Inside Story

Asama's Friends

Asama looked between the changing room clock and the two uniforms hanging in front of her eyes.

...These definitely aren't going to dry in time.

The changing room had a dehumidifier and divine protections to the same end. That would be more than enough to dry a normal uniform, but she had overlooked the various divine protections placed on those two's uniforms recently.

"This isn't going to work like it usually does for drying Toori-kun's crossdressing uniform..."

She should have expected it to work the same as her own uniform.

But when she checked the clock and the remaining drying time...

"Kimi, Mito, I'll leave your uniforms here, so let's get something to eat first. They should be dry by the time we're done."

"Eh? Oh, is that so?" asked Mitotsudaira. "I just assumed you drank sake for breakfast here."

"...What kind of family do you think we are?"

Asama heard water dripping at the spring. She peeked that way and saw Kimi standing up and letting the water flow off of her body's curves and her hair. She caught the drops falling from her breasts and pointed her chin toward Mitotsudaira who sat on the edge of the spring.

"Then can you hurry it up, Asama? Mitotsudaira is about ready to use a bottle if she has to wait any longer."

“I am not! I am not!!”

“Yes, yes,” said Asama as she pulled a yukata from the changing room shelf.

There was only the 1. The one she had been wearing was in the basket, but there were 3 of them at the moment and a total of 2 yukatas. Asama confirmed that fact, and...

“Ohh.”

After some discussion, they settled on a certain course of action. Asama had initially wanted to return to the main building first and grab an extra yukata, but...

“You want me to stay here alone with Kimi!?”

That plan was rejected. They ended up wearing the 2 yukatas with Asama and Mitotsudaira standing back to back and each putting on half of each yukata. Then Kimi entered between them. Once they closed the front, it covered them fairly well.

This is almost like a hidden talent, thought Asama fairly seriously as they walked to the main building.

Mitotsudaira had difficulty matching their pace since she was in the back and facing backwards, but about halfway there...

“Ah, sorry, you two, but I can’t resist any longer!”

Kimi suddenly touched Asama and Mitotsudaira’s butts. And she stuck her finger into the crack.

Asama shrieked and pulled her hips back in rejection, but it seemed Mitotsudaira did the same thing. A grinning Kimi and 2 falling yukatas were left behind as Asama and Mitotsudaira knocked each other out into the open.

Title Page

*When you take a breath and warm yourself
Take that chance to relax all at once
And say hello to a place where you can rewind*



Kimitoasamade

Prologue "Drunk Girl at a Place of Washing Away Impurity "	... P5
Chapter 1 "Noisy Girls by the Window" P35
Chapter 2 "Insufficient One at a Half Place" P79
Chapter 3 "Those with Too Much in the Measuring Room" P109
Chapter 4 "Deliberators Before the Darkness" P135

III
A

Kawakami Minoru

Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)
Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)

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III

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Characters

character

Musashi



Asama Tomo

A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. The only daughter of the Asama Shrine and a mid-level shrine maiden. Specializes in archery and in tuning ley lines. Stands at the top of the class's boob caste system. Childhood friends with the nudist and his stupid sister.



Aoi Kimi

A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Asama's childhood friend and her foolish brother's older sister. An Ootsubaki-style musician with plenty of dancing and sexuality spells. More considerate than anything.



Nate Mitotsudaira

A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Provisional inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name, a half-werewolf from Hexagone Française, rank 1 member of Musashi's knight's league, low on the boob caste system, speaks in a somewhat noble fashion, likes chokers, likes meat, and generally the victim. Calls the idiot her king.



Adele Balfette

A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Glasses. Lowest on the class's boob caste system. Yes, lowest. An Hexagone Française style of vassal. Has leg strength and can perform an excellent assault, but lives a poor part-timer's life. Loves dogs.



Mukai Suzu

A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Blind girl. Stopper for the horrible actions of the class. Sometimes accelerates them instead.



Malga Naruze

A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Black and white and has nothing. Six-winged fallen angel. Doujin author. Fairly bitter. In a relationship with Naito.



Margot Naito

A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Gold and black and has plenty. Six-winged descended angel. Oh, dear. Oh, my. Ah ha ha ha ha. In a relationship with Naruze.



P-01s

A normal citizen. Or rather, an automaton. Apparently boarded the Musashi at Mikawa this spring. Has no memories, was taken in by the Blue Thunder, and works there. Cement-like.



Naomasa

A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Barely appears so there might be no point in putting her here. Works as a team leader in the engine division and has one false arm.



Honda Masazumi

Crossdressing girl who transferred in from Mikawa. Let me say that again: crossdressing girl. No, that doesn't mean she wears a cross. Her gags get icy reactions.

"Musashi"

Our overall captain automaton. Her sharp-tongued mode is the best. Over.

"Okutama"

Caption of Okutama. "Musashi" tends to do a lot of the work, so she often ends up emptyhanded. Sometimes uses different bodies for different uses.

Normal Students

Aren't going to work hard this time.



Aoi Toori

Already a nudist at this point.

character

• Musashi

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- Normal Students: Aren’t going to work hard this time.
- Aoi Toori: Already a nudist at this point.

Glossary

F

•**Far East:** Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.

G

•**God of War:** A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.

•**Graduation:** No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

H

•**Harmonic Territory:** Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.

•**Harmonic Unification War:** A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.

•**Harmonic World:** A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.

•**Hexagone Française:** Mouri clan + France.

•**History Recreation:** Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.

•**Holy Spells:** Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

I

•**Inherited Name:** The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.

•**Internal Blessings:** blessings stored within oneself.

•**IZUMO:** The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

•**Judge/Judgment:** Means "understood". Used by criminals.

K

•**K.P.A. Italia:** Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

•**Ley Line:** The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.

A

•**Academy:** An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.

•**Academy Rules:** The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.

•**Apocalypse:** The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.

•**ATELL:** The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

•**Blessings:** The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

•**Catholic:** The old mainstream version of Tsirhc.

•**Chancellor's Officers:** An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.

•**Contradiction Allowance:** The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

•**Divine States:** Former name of the Far East.

•**Divine Weapon:** A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

•**Emperor:** A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.

•**England:** Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.

•**Ether:** Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.

•**Ether Engine:** An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.

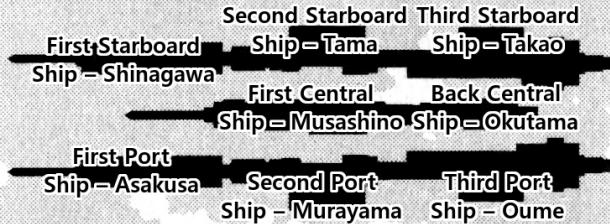
•**Ether Fuel:** Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.

•**Ether Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.

•**External Blessings:** Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

words

- Shirasago Enterprises:** IZUMO's shrine brand.



- Sign Frame:** Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
- Spell:** Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Student Council:** The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution:** Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.

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- Tes/Testament:** Means "understood".
- Testament:** A history book that provides the history of the earth's previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
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- Testament Union:** An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Tres España:** Ouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc:** A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

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- Magic:** Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.:** Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa:** Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Miasi:** A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse:** A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi:** Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.
- Musashi Ariadust Academy:** The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician:** A religion's worshiper.

O

- Offering:** Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Nero:** Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A. Oda:** Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Protestant:** A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.

R

- Religion:** Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- Shinto:** Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.

●Asama's Plans●



"Sis! Sis! What are you gonna do now that you're in a bit of a high after beating that dragon!?"



"Heh heh heh. High brother? First, we'll gather what we need for our band and put together a countermeasure against further mysterious phenomena."

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[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

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Asama's Plans

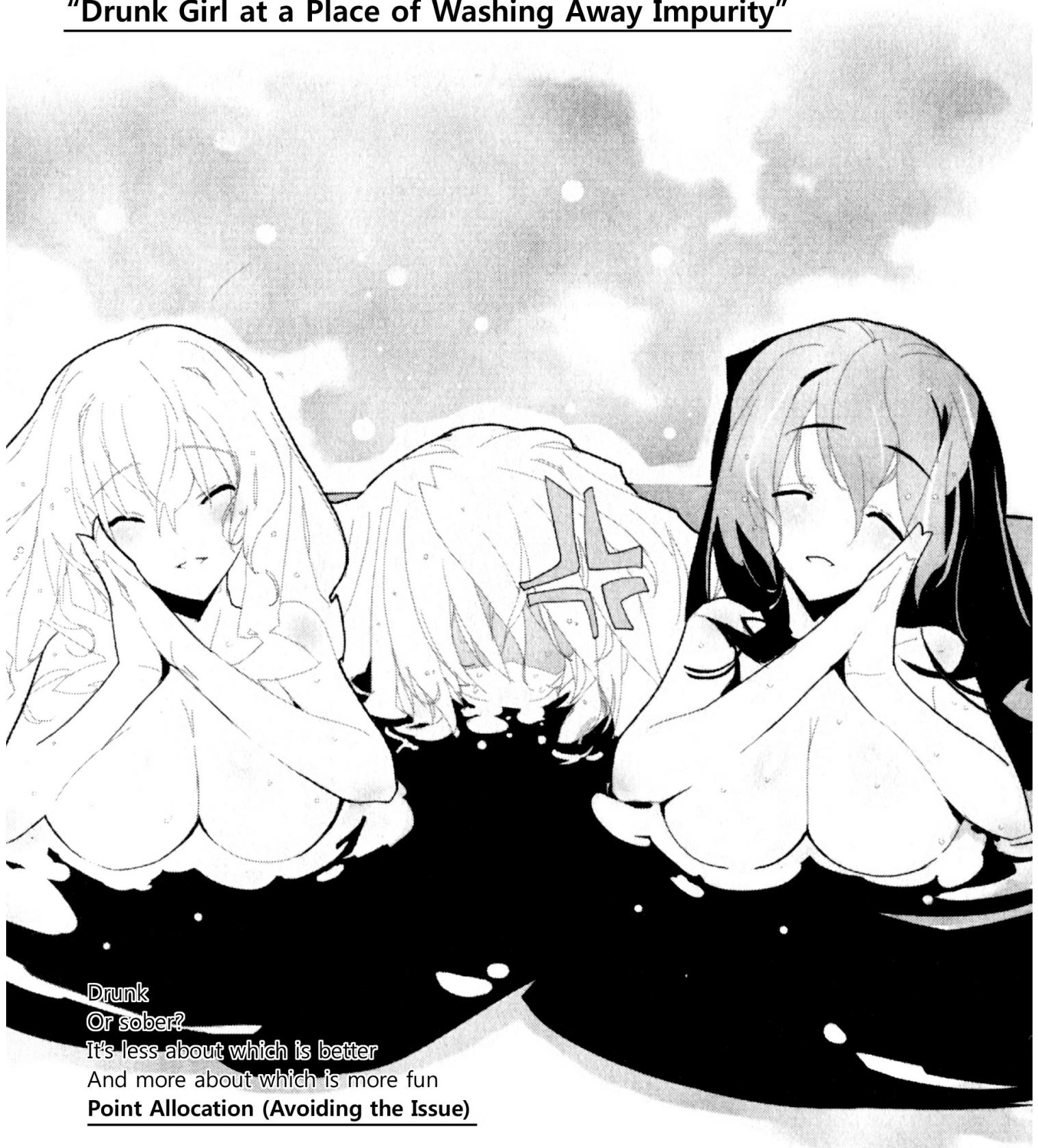
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Prologue: Drunk Girl at a Place of Washing Away Impurity

PROLOGUE

"Drunk Girl at a Place of Washing Away Impurity"



Drunk
Or sober?
It's less about which is better
And more about which is more fun
Point Allocation (Avoiding the Issue)

Drunk

Or sober?

It's less about which is better

And more about which is more fun

Point Allocation (Avoiding the Issue)

Morning came early at the Asama Shrine.

Supposedly.

Asama woke at 6 in the morning. She normally woke before 5 to perform her purification and to work with Hanami on the early-morning ether management that served as the foundation of Musashi's management. But...

"...Hanami?"

Hanami was sleeping on the pillow with Uzy.

That meant no job requests had arrived from the Asama Shrine.

...My dad did it for me, didn't he?

He likely understood what had happened the night before and had let her rest.

She was lying in her futon with Kimi on her left and Mitotsudaira on her right. Kimi always slept in the nude and hugged things in her sleep, so her yukata was almost entirely removed and she clung to Asama close enough that her body heat tickled her.

On the other hand, Mitotsudaira was sniffing at Asama in her sleep, which was quite cute in its own way.

The Cerberus on her head was about to slip right off, which was also cute.

But once they woke, she told them the band name she had thought up during the night and they spent their time smiling both bitterly and otherwise.

"Then let's go with that."

"It certainly is a perfect description of us right now..."

It really is, thought Asama as she submitted the divine transmission document with their names on it to the Gagaku Festival HQ.

While she did not take a full morning bath, the Asama Shrine practice was to purify oneself in the morning. In order to hold the first "Kimitoasamade Planning Meeting", Kimi and Mitotsudaira accompanied her. But...

...Yes, I should have known this would happen...

Kimi had no trouble at all in the wooden spring bath, but Mitotsudaira...

"Cold! Th-this spring always is absolutely freezing!"

Mitotsudaira made a temporary retreat and sat on the edge of the bath. Her pride insisted she at least keep her legs soaking in the spring and she naively thought she might get used to the temperature.

The wooden frame felt warm below her butt, but that was probably only an illusion. The heat below her chilled skin was only warming her skin due to the pressure from sitting on the frame.

...That's the Asama spring for you!

The water was unusually clear.

That was likely because the Asama Shrine was the foundation of Musashi's ether management.

The Asama Shrine managed the ether pathways and the ether fuel that was refined by the Musashi.

That meant highly pure water was sent to the Asama Shrine where it was purified before being sent to the different ships. The purified water's role was to absorb the ether stagnations and inconvenient "impurities" that occurred in the different ships. It circulated within the Musashi and was purified again below the Asama Shrine and other shrines so it could be reused.

The water in this spring had been tuned to the highest level within the Musashi and had then been given a high-level purification divine protection by

the Asama Shrine's techniques.

The Shirasago brand logos seen here and there were proof of that. During the great remodeling at IZUMO nine years before, Okutama had been remade into the main ship for Musashi as a whole, and the Asama Shrine had been strengthened as Musashi's Shinto representative at the time.

A structure as large as the Musashi could only "last" due to the purification of the "impurities" that was only possible due to that strengthening.

That meant the water they were casually soaking in was literally the water of life that supported the giant city ship. It would remove the impurities from everything that touched it and it would tune anything. But...

"It even negates the hair grooming divine protection I have as part of my species," complained Mitotsudaira.

"No, I think it technically overloads that divine protection."

Asama gave her a bitter smile from the spring. She let her hair swim through the water and moved as if to pour water over her head.

"Mito, your divine protection is an inborn thing. ...That means it's a part of who you are and it can't be purified away. Instead, I think the divine protection is able to relax inside this purifying spring, so it absorbs the water and tries to expel the excess inside your body."

"You're saying my divine protection knows this water will help with my 'grooming'?"

"That's right," said Kimi as she placed her elbows on the edge of the bath and lay face down in the water. She traced her fingers along Mitotsudaira's thigh. "It's like your pretty-pretty divine protection is rejoicing that it's found a shampoo that suits it. So, Mitotsudaira, it isn't that your skin is repelling the water; it's licking it."

Sure enough, the water dripping down her skin seemed to stretch out and slowly spill down. But...

"I don't think it had this much of an effect when I've been here before."

"That probably means you've grown and your species divine protection has

grown stronger. Also..."

"Maybe you've started a lazier lifestyle, so you're more used to relaxing. C'mon, c'mon."

Kimi tugged on her ankles in the water. She was clearly going to pull Mitotsudaira in if she ignored her, so Mitotsudaira breathed in and prepared to enter the water.

"Oh, if it feels cold, exhale and then imagine you're continuing to exhale as you get in," advised Asama. "If your body is tense and you have your body-heated breath in your lungs, it will only feel colder. Just relax."

"R-relax?"

Should she really be using the English word in a Shinto spring? wondered Mitotsudaira as she did as told. She hesitantly exhaled and slowly entered the water by lowering the back of her thighs instead of her lap.

...Wow.

The word "cold" itself seemed to enter the areas where her skin had been touching.

"Nn."

She sat down so the water rose to her shoulders. She felt like nothing else would count as fully soaking her body. And following her pride and efforts, the cold enveloped her body and she shivered.

Kimi immediately spoke up.

"No peeing."

"N-no one would do that!"

"Don't be so sure." Kimi waved a hand as she spun her body toward Mitotsudaira. "Back when my foolish brother began his contract, he suddenly raised his hand and said, 'Sorry, I just made an offering. A pee offering. Know what I mean? Hm?' This spring's purification device wasn't isolated at the time, so for a whole day, no one was allowed to ingest any water and the Musashi was brought to an emergency stop."

Before thinking “that idiot”, Mitotsudaira found herself thinking “I should have known”. But then Kimi moved close and whispered into her ear.

“That means my foolish brother marked us back then.”

“Wh-what does that mean!?”

“Heh heh. Do you want him to do it to you too?”

She felt like such a fool for briefly hesitating in her answer, but the idiot sister relaxed her legs below herself in the water and rested her cheek on her hand.

“I understand, Mitotsudaira. You want some kind of proof of the master-servant relationship with your king while you play and frolic with him, don’t you? You want to be covered in your king’s scent as proof that you belong to him and have no other king. Frolicking and licking him isn’t enough for you and only receiving his adoration doesn’t satisfy you, so you want him to defile you like animals playing in the mud. ...C’mom, you want to get cutely down on your knees, bow down, and then lick him while you beg for it, don’t you?”

“N-no, um...”

Her body temperature rose as she imagined it, but the chilly water held her thoughts in check.

“N-not even a Loup-Garou does that!”

“Hee hee. Dear? We pulled an all-nighter ‘studying’, but it looks like that wasn’t enough for you. ...Now, now. I can tell even if you bury your face in the pillow and sob. You want to do more for me, don’t you? But you think you’re too awkward and don’t know what to do so you always just let me guide you. But you know what I want you to do now, don’t you?”

That being...

“If we view what we just finished as the midpoint of the battle, then I want you to mark me now. C’mom, get up. Your cute wolf...um, who is still very cute. Yes, she’s still got her cuteness. Anyway, your cute wolf is bowing down begging for it. Yes, please don’t hesitate. I’ll lick you until you’re ready. Hee hee. You can hold back if you want. But you don’t get to say no in the end.”

"I-I'm suddenly feeling much less confident in that assertion, but w-we really don't do that!"

She decided to leave the "probably" in her heart.

Asama then nodded between Kimi and Mitotsudaira.

"Th-that's right, Kimi. Mito wouldn't do that."

"Judge! I wouldn't!"

"Yes, rumor has it the Loup-Garou species can share and circulate their bodily divine protections and thoughts with their partner, so once they start frolicking, they can keep going for days. And they're apparently super willing to beg in a doggy pose, so it isn't a conscious desire like you were suggesting, Kimi. ... Probably."

"That's even worse! And what was that 'probably' for!?"

However, Mitotsudaira had heard pretty much the same thing from her mother, so she was a little worried on a personal front. She silently begged her future self to restrain herself and Asama told her to calm down.

"Anyway, Kimi and Mito? That story about Toori-kun marking us? That happened when everyone was here. We were staying here for a school event during elementary school."

"Eh? R-really?"

Mitotsudaira suddenly recalled staying at the Asama Shrine then. He had not been her king back then and Horizon had been with them. She vaguely recalled Horizon punching the idiot, but that may have been a memory she was inventing now.

She wanted to ask Asama about it, but then Kimi nodded.

"We were lucky your dad acted as the investigator back then. I was questioned alongside my foolish brother and, when your dad asked him 'why did you do that?', he answered 'I couldn't hold it in!' without missing a beat."

"My father said 'I completely understand' and immediately released him,

didn't he?"

Is that really an acceptable reason? But Asama only smiled with lowered eyebrows and said more.

"My father was apparently glad that he was able to prove the deficiencies in sharing divine water between the Asama Shrine and the Musashi. That allowed the basic structure here to be given its current shape during the later great remodeling at IZUMO."

"I'm not sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing..."

"It might have been a bad thing, but we turned it into a good thing. That's how Shinto works."

Asama stood up. Water splashed down from her body, droplets trailed along her curves, and dripped down from the points.

"Reversing good and bad is a characteristic trait of Shinto. There are stories of a god asking to be given a corpse or something impure and having the offering turn into a hunk of gold the following day. There are also stories of tilling and caring for bad land to have it turn into good land. The most important part of turning bad into good is to never doubt and to remain honest. Toori-kun is stupidly honest and keeps things simple, so my dad really likes him."

Asama's tone of voice made it sound like there was a "so" coming.

...So...

So when Horizon was "lost", he did not doubt and honestly *tried to do the same to himself*.

But *that* was a mistaken form of "honesty".

If he was truly honest and without doubt, he would not have chosen that method. If he viewed death as impure, he should have taken time to accept it so that it could be turned into gold.

So, repeated Mitotsudaira in her heart.

...So Kimi forced him to do that.

He was on the verge of "dying" himself, so she essentially killed him again to

change him. He could not transform Horizon's loss, so she had transformed him.

That was why Asama's father had such a high opinion of the two and why Asama could never thank Kimi enough.

Relationships really are continuous things, thought Mitotsudaira.

Asama then approached her.

"You too, Kimi."

"Yes," said Kimi as she also approached.

As Mitotsudaira wondered what they were doing, they lowered themselves into the water up to their shoulders on either side of her.

"If you're between us, our bodies will warm the water for you. See?"

In response to Asama's invitation...

...It's not like the water warms up right away.

But Mitotsudaira did find relief in having someone next to her. It told her she was not being abandoned or ignored.

So...

"You're right."

That was all she said before taking her position between the other two.

It was cold, but...

...Judge.

Their bodies and the bath's inner wall blocked the slight current in the spring. The barely moving water absorbed the heat from Asama, Kimi, and her.

"It really is warming."

"It truly is being done 'Kimi to Asama de'."^[1]

Asama laughed and narrowed her eyes. That laugh and her action brought a thought to Mitotsudaira's mind.

...She really is the motherly type.

Or was she more of a dedicated wife? Her long history with the Aoi family had taken the “caretaker and helper” aspect of a shrine maiden and amplified it to an extreme degree.

Her ability was probably enough to cover Kimi and the other one on her level. Mitotsudaira had to be much less difficult than that “other one”, so she had a feeling she knew where Asama’s pleasant laughter came from: *...She can handle this with ease.*

How did her own mother view it? She would send a divine mail every once in a while, but their last instance of physical contact had been almost 10 years before. And it had not been a pleasant experience.

But before that...

“Should I move a little closer?”

Asama must have interpreted her silence as feeling cold, so she moved close enough to directly feel her heat. Kimi did the same.

...They’re huge...

This voluminous attack forced all of her thoughts in that direction, but their heat did reach her.

...Yes.

She recalled when her mother had carried her long ago.

She wondered what her mother was doing now.

“Ah, nn, Dear? Did you have to aim for when I was trembling and unable to move because you earned a full score by marking me with such a wonderful scent? Ahee. Y-yes! Keep studying! You can keep going, can’t you!? Hold the teaching aid so you can perform the test. Y-yes, this pose supported by my chest and knees is called a three-point support. And then...ah, w-wait. That’s outside the scope of the current lesson... Ah, n-no. Pull the cylinder out now and you’ll only score 80 points. Wait until the end...yes, yes, that will get you a full 100 points. Hee hee. ...Now, let’s continue practicing until we both

remember everything. Should I score each one separately? Ah, full points! Full points, papa!"

"Mito!? You look really lost in thought. Are you okay?"

"Oh, um, I just had a feeling that reality is a terrible thing..."

"I see," said Asama, clearly not seeing at all.

She then twisted backwards a little.

"It looks like Mito is used to the water now..."

Mitotsudaira looked back as well and saw Asama opening a box next to the wall.

"Would you like some pre-breakfast sake?"

Simultaneously filled with a surprised "don't tell me" and a resigned "I should have known", Mitotsudaira asked a question.

"Why do you have sake prepared?"

"Offering divine sake up to your god is one of a shrine maiden's jobs. And you of course have to drink what's leftover afterwards."

Asama quickly smiled and placed a largish sake cup and bottle on a tray floating in the spring.

"Heh heh," laughed Kimi. "You make your offering by drinking it, don't you?"

"Some people think so, but no."

Asama looked somewhat discouraged and Mitotsudaira tilted her head.

"You don't?"

"N-no, I don't! What kind of person do you think I am!?"

"But in elementary school, you cried when our homeroom teacher confiscated your sake bottle during lunch."

"Sorry, that was for an offering as part of my shrine maiden job and I was crying because something my father had given me was taken away. I wasn't a drunk crying because her alcohol had been taken from her."

"Really...?"

Learning more about your friends was a good thing, but Mitotsudaira had to wonder if she was imagining the stiffness in Asama's smile.

At any rate, Kimi gave a quiet nasal laugh.

"True enough. People think you drink it as an offering, but the process is actually the reverse, isn't it?"

"Th-that's right. Yes."

Asama entered her usual explanatory mode. She did not seem to realize it herself, but she seemed to quite like doing this.

And so Mitotsudaira played along.

"How does the offering process work for you?"

"Eh? Oh, right. The process is the same for a shrine maiden like me as it is for a priest like my father. In other words, after the offering is made, any leftovers are a 'return offering' from your god, so the process is completed by taking it for yourself. There are different types of offerings. The simplest is the Official Offering where you provide the offering and receive the return offering. There is also the Substitution Offering where you provide something other than the original offering item. Then there are the offerings where you receive your god's divine protection instead of a return offering of what you offered. We do this regularly using Blessings and it's technically known as a Substitution Return Offering. In that case, your god often rents out the divine protection of another god. But in the case of an Official Offering, the return offering is a divine artifact. So if it's food or drink like rice or divine sake, you gain a divine protection or Blessing by consuming it."

"For example, if you offer up a sword to a sword god, it will have that sword god's divine protection when returned as a return offering, right?"

"That's right." Asama nodded toward Kimi. "So I drink the divine sake to accumulate Blessings, but it's only part of the 'make offering, receive return offering' process. If you only see that final step, it does look a lot like I drink to power up. And when I have an unplanned drink, I make it into a substitution for one of my other offerings."

As expected, she gave a detailed explanation.

I see, thought Mitotsudaira before asking about something regarding their new band.

“What about with Gagaku?”

“Oh.” Asama seemed to understand what she was getting at. “I don’t have to worry about singing normal songs. The gods understand when you are or aren’t singing to them. If they like it, they’ll listen, but they won’t get mad even if they don’t like it.”

But...

“Even when Gagaku is used as an offering, it’s a pretty low-level one. You can think of it as currying the favor of your god...that is, confirming and strengthening your connection to them. So if you’re really after a return offering through music, you have to physically offer a recording of music instead of making a live performance. With the exception of Dengaku meant to improve the results of the agricultural harvest, you don’t have to worry about any other songs.”

“Ho ho.”

Mitotsudaira gently applauded to show her understanding and Kimi followed suit.

“Yes.” Asama nodded but then smiled bitterly as if she had remembered something. “That said, another common misunderstanding is that offerings are made through the shrine maiden. In addition to our normal rituals, we handle the process for the offerings brought to the shrine, but we are not actually a necessary part of that process. The ‘offer to your god and receive something in return’ process is the same for shrine maiden and normal person alike. Even if you leave it to the shrine maiden, the return offering needs to be returned to the original offerer.”

“Then what happens if you ‘make an offering to your god through a shrine maiden’ which is so commonly referenced in certain publications?”

“Hmm.” Asama looked up toward heaven as she thought. And after a while, “I suppose it must be returned to the offerer off-page. As a reverse injection. I

don't really know how that would work, but they would receive a divine punishment if they didn't do it. But that would probably be really painful for the guy."

"That makes me shudder...!"

"That's why Naruze and the others always tell me they can't make things strictly accurate. Let's try to have some dreams."

"Is there no other way?"

"Well, technically speaking, it would be as a spell instead of an offering. Kimi, you would know about this, wouldn't you? It's an Ootsubaki thing."

"Oh, is it?" Kimi tilted her head and narrowed her eyes toward Asama. "I was talking about the references to food offerings in cookbooks. Are you sure we're on the same page here?"

"Eh!? Um, yessss, we arrre. Definitelyyyy. Wh-what else could I have meant, Kimi!?"

"Do you two need to be purified first thing in the morning!?"

The other two held out their hands to calm Mitotsudaira and then Kimi pulled Asama's tray over.

"Well, it's no Oath of the Peach Garden."

"Yes, it's out of season for cherry blossoms and plums too."

Asama sat down so the 3 of them surrounded the tray.

Yes, thought Mitotsudaira.

This is a drink to new beginnings.

Asama started to pour sake into the cup.

"Ah, no. All 3 of us need to pour it."

...Kimi can be pretty picky about these relationship details.

So Asama poured a bit first. Then...

"Mito, go ahead."

“Judge, leave it to me.”

Mitotsudaira filled it halfway and handed it to Kimi.

“Wait, Kimi! Why are you pouring it right up to the brim like you’re testing the surface tension!?”

“Well, with you here, I figured we needed at least this much.”

“Oh, that’s a good point,” added Mitotsudaira.

“Huh? Huh? That answer doesn’t help anyone.”

At any rate, the sake was in the largish cup.

Kimi and Mitotsudaira looked to Asama. They seemed to be telling her to say something, even if it was cliché.

“Uhh...”

She thought for a bit. A ritual Shinto prayer would be fine, but...

“Ritually filling the sake cup is said to symbolize your fulfillment or your expectation for future fulfillment.”

So...

“So that we might be able to hold even more in the future and so that our individual capacities might increase, let all three of us share this cup here.”

Mitotsudaira and Kimi applauded, but Asama was so into the performance that she held out a hand to silence them. And...

“Who should go first?”

“Since you’re cold, Mitotsudaira, why not you?”

“But isn’t this really Tomo’s place to go first?”

“No, I...”

“That’s right,” said Kimi. “You want to go last so you can drink the most, don’t you?”

“You had to go there, didn’t you!? Didn’t you!?”

However, that was the truth. In these rituals, most people would take a single

sip. But in Musashi's Shinto weddings, the rules stated "you might receive divine punishment if you don't drink it all", so the husband tended to end up a victim.

So...

"Then I will go last."

"That's fine with me. You'll stay true to yourself to the very end, so you need to finish things off yourself."

"I'm not sure I'd put it like that... Wait, Kimi, the sake!"

She watched as Kimi poured the bottle's remaining sake into the spring. She shook the bottle to get out every last drop and then gave Asama a grin.

"Now it's a sake bath. I don't know if it'll warm us, but it should be nice celebrating with your entire body, right? And the purification effect will keep the smell from lingering on us."

"That might be true, but not even I've ever done this before..."

"What's wrong with it?"

Kimi took the sake cup with her right hand. The surface tension was at its limit, so the sake swelled up and wiggled like a soft object. Then Kimi brought the cup to her lips.

"Nn."

And she drank.

She cleanly swallowed the excess sake and her own portion. Then she set the cup down and clapped her hands.

"Your sake is always so rough on the throat."

"That makes it more satisfying after you swallow."

"Th-then it's my turn."

Mitotsudaira clapped twice and then picked up the cup with both hands.

"Kh...n."

She briefly paused, presumably because her Loup-Garou senses of taste and

smell were not used to the smell of sake. But after she let the scent pass through her nose and she took a breath, she calmed down.

“...Nn.”

With the cup only half full, she held it out toward Asama.

Asama took the cup. Had the other two left half of the sake because they were trying to be nice?

But as she looked at the cup of sake, Asama knew she was not that fulfilled.

...So I need to pray that I will be more fulfilled from here on.

Thus, she brought it to her lips.

“Nn...”

She drank it. She closed her eyes, gulped it down, and opened her eyes while still facing upwards.

...Ah.

She saw the usual sky. It was the white sky of the stealth barrier.

She had looked up at that sky every day since she was a child. But...

...Yes.

It looked different today.

It was the same as always and it was different. That “difference” would continue for a while. And even if it ended, it would only prove that she could choose a “different” path.

She would treat it with care.

With that in mind, she licked out the last drop, even though she knew it was gluttonous.

“Yes.”

She lowered the cup and her gaze.

She saw slight smiles on the other two’s faces. She naturally found herself

returning that smile.

"Hee hee. This is the beginning, isn't it?"

"Judge. Heh heh. It really is the beginning. Heh heh heh."

Kimi took a breath and opened her mouth.

And she suddenly formed words.

"I join my voice with yours again and again."

It was a song, albeit a somewhat altered one.

"That's the Asama Shrine's Sakuya Song, isn't it?"

"It is. If you know it, sing along, will you?"

Affected by the sake, Kimi sang her alteration of the normal Gagaku song.

Mitotsudaira and Asama joined Kimi in the song.

"I send you this night of blooming flowers."^[2]

The Asama Shrine's primary god, Konohana no Sakuya, was the Far East's current god of love, marriage, and fertility.

"If I sing and dance of never-parting lives."

In the lyrics Asama sang, Sakuya was sent with her older sister to the heavenly god Ninigi, but Ninigi sent back her ugly older sister and married the beautiful Sakuya.

"The great god Sakuya sings and smiles."

There were many stories, but...

...The next part is mine.

"The spray of the blossoming chain."

As Mitotsudaira sang, she realized Sakuya had a very stubborn side to her. And as Asama continued to sing...

"When the never-parting sigh heats and cools."

Sakuya was said to possess the element of both water and fire.

“Tilt the cup and pour her out.”

That sounded strange, but it was because water also connected to sake. It was almost like...

“Swing out from within the frame.”

This is just like Asama, thought Mitotsudaira.

“Raise a fire in the shrine of the heavenly god.”

When Sakuya was with child, she was suspected of infidelity by her husband. To prove her innocence, she set fire to the delivery room and gave birth without issue, thus proving that her child had the blood of a heavenly god.

“Raise it toward the red-hot mountain and the sky.”

From that, Sakuya was known as a god of fire and she was given Mt. Fuji by her father god.

“The child of fire becomes a flower in the spring.”

But Sakuya was actually the god of the signs of the spring season, such as cherry blossoms and plums.

“The cherry blossom, the plum, and the camellia in the Asama spring.”

That was why the Asama Shrine viewed her as a water god.

“I am drawn by your smile as you blossom and blow in the wind.”

The Asama Shrine was a shrine of women, but Asama’s mother had come from outside.

“Adorned by chains and a crown of flowers.”

Her father had fallen in love with her mother at first sight and made her his wife.

“Before you, I am a spring.”

That was different from the ancient legend, but did that matter?

“I’ve fallen in love on this night of blooming flowers.”

Mitotsudaira had a thought as their voices joined together.

What about the ancient Sakuya?

"Before you, I am a spring."

Had she enjoyed singing?

"I've fallen in love on this night of blooming flowers."

And the song came to a close.

That's a story, thought Asama as she considered those familiar lyrics.

The songs she had heard before had all been stories of the singer herself. They were about the singer and listener sharing their memories, lifestyles, and ways of thinking.

But this one was different. It was mostly fictional, a story one could read in a book.

Was there any reason to listen to that story *as a song*?

...There is.

This was not just the result of her bias as she grew to adore songs.

A story was words.

What did it mean to turn it into music by making it a song?

The music allowed it to carry emotion and vision in addition to the words.

After all, music could rise and fall in pitch or include different intonations.

Short, low notes carried intensity. Long, high notes sounded refreshing. Notes that continued slowly felt stagnant. Notes that extended long but quickly were reminiscent of great speed.

Notes with the volume of a shout contained implications before even getting to the carried meaning. It aroused an emotional response before the listener could even contemplate the meaning.

Asama felt there was a great meaning in this.

When she had read the story in a book, she had no way of knowing if her interpretation and the emotions she felt were “correct”.

But with music, the emotions it brought were absolute. Especially when the speed was concerned, there was no mistaking it.

So, she thought.

It is important to read a story from a book, contemplate it, and understand it.

But songs helped you know if your understanding was correct. And more importantly...

...A song brings you into the story and gives you a rough understanding very quickly.

That was an old, old story from a long distant time.

To read it as text required “research” and “interpretation”, but if you shortened it and put it to music, the characters involved and their emotions throughout were put into focus.

In that case, thought Asama. This song is doing more than just singing the story. It's showing the scene at the time and the emotions of the people.

It was more accurate than reading a book. Faster too. And...

“...It’s catchy.”

“Isn’t that a good thing?”

Kimi understands this well, thought Asama with a small smile.

“Hee hee.”

It grew to a laugh and Kimi joined her.

“Ah ha ha.”

Next was Mitotsudaira’s turn.

“C-c’mon, Kimi, what is that vulgar laugh for? Eh heh. Heh heh heh heh.”

“Oh, but, Mito, you can’t seem to stop laughing either. Heh heh heh heh heh.”

“Ah ha ha ha ha ha.”

As she laughed, Mitotsudaira suddenly sank while still smiling.

“Kyaaaaah! Mito!?”

“Ohh, I’m drunk. I’m really drunk.”

Asama did not need to ask why: It was the sake bath.

“So basically, the sake’s divine protection is directly entering our bodies thanks to the spring’s purification, so the alcohol is going straight to us. Right, Kimi?”

Kimi too sank down. Asama look down at the two who had vanished to the bottom of the water.

...This is like a crime scene!

She would have said it was like a mysterious phenomenon, but she decided that would be inappropriate for a Shinto shrine maiden. That said, it would be treated as a crime if she did not pull them up soon.

A drowning after turning the spring into a sake bath would have to be a first for the Asama Shrine. It would be a brand new kind of scandal.

Kimi was especially dangerous. Mito was dangerous enough while submerged with a smile on her face, but Kimi was using her last strength to strike a pose where she lifted up her own breasts. If the guards came to investigate this, who knows what they would say about Asama who had been with them. No, she could make some decent predictions, but she really did not want to think about it.

So she hurriedly tried to pull them up, but they were heavy.

“C-come to think of it, their hair has to get really heavy when it’s soaked up so much water!”

She had to quickly pull up the two human sponges.

“Honestly, this is not how I wanted to spend the morning of a new beginning!”

Asama sighed as she grabbed them and stood up. Despite the splashing water, she worked to pull Kimi and Mitotsudaira out.

...You really lose out when you're the only one that didn't get drunk...

She heard the academy bell ring in the distance to indicate it was 7 in the morning.

"And we're supposed to be at school early today for the health examination to prepare for the spring academy festival."

Honestly.

"Why are things always like this!?"

Chapter 1: Noisy Girls by the Window

第一章

『窓際の姦し娘達』



It is noisy girls

Not violating girls

Or violated girls^[3]

Point Allocation (I Knew That)

There was a white and black structure in the white sky.

It was a giant aerial ship composed of eight smaller ships and it existed at the center of a giant stealth barrier.

Each ship's bow was printed with the name "Musashi" and they floated motionlessly inside the white stealth barrier they produced themselves.

But in place of movement, there was noise. For the most part, it was the sound of the virtual ocean crashing at the waterline as it kept the Musashi afloat. And in addition to that...

"-----"

There were sounds of striking metal and shouting voices.

Those noises came from the rear deck of the first port and starboard ships, the road in front of the stairway to the academy at the back of the central rear ship, and in the plaza below that stairway.

Construction was underway in those places.

It was nothing largescale. They were only constructing and decorating festival stands and stages in the streets and plazas. In some cases, they hooked up power cables and added lights.

All the construction had a single purpose:

"The spring school festival? I am pleased to see we likely have another success on our hands this year, Sakai-sama. Over."

On Okutama's bow deck "Musashi" served Sakai a teacup below the morning light that arrived through the stealth barrier.

"But if anything, it appears today's preparations might end with only pulling

the materials out of storage. Over.”

“Yeah, I hear a lot of the location assignments haven’t been ironed out yet,” said Sakai while viewing Okutama’s city from the bench. He saw some people begin the work by removing the signs that decorated Okutama’s shopping district and streets. “This event is used to redecorate the city from spring to summer. How many years have we been doing it now, ‘Musashi’-san?”

“You might be intending that as a trick question, but I was only installed as overall captain nine years ago, so I can only answer for that nine year period. Over.”

“No, no. That wasn’t what I meant, ‘Musashi’-san. If you check the records, it will show this seasonal tradition has been around since the academy was made 30 years ago.”

“The records...?” “Musashi” tilted her head. And a moment later, “I have retrieved the data. ...I have confirmed that this seasonal tradition was established even before 30 years ago. Over.”

“Really? Before there was an academy?”

Sakai raised his eyebrows and “Musashi” gave a deep nod. And...

“Would you like some more tea? I can provide some breakfast too. Over.”

“Oh, I think I’ll take you up on that. What’s for breakfast today?”

“Something made by removing the nutrients from unpolished rice and steaming it, something made by cooking a wild fish alive, and something made by sterilizing rotten beans with salt, turning them into a paste soup, and placing it over high heat for a bit. Over.”

“Could I get a giant chicken cell with that?”

“Judge. I thought you might ask, so I had one prepared.”

“Musashi” snapped her fingers and something fell from the sky behind her.

It was a sword. The long weapon was drawn. A large bento box wrapped in a cloth was tied to the hilt and it had been thrown by...

“‘Asakusa’, I have determined that was well done. Over.”

“Musashi” looked to where the blade had stabbed. It had pierced the seam between two of the hardened wooden panels forming the deck and, even after she pulled it out...

“I have determined the gap would have vanished had the ship shaken. Over.”

“That’s incredible, ‘Musashi’-san.”

“‘Asakusa’, Sakai-sama just praised you. Over.”

“Judge. Thank you very much.”

But when “Asakusa” appeared on the sign frame, she continued before saying “over”. And she did so while expressionlessly tilting her head.

“Um, ‘Musashi’-sama. Making sure the ship does not shake is quite difficult, so I would prefer you did not make me do that again. Over.”

“Judge. Understood.” “Musashi” gave a deep nod. “Then I shall control the ship next time. Over.”

“Eh? Over.”

“What was that ‘eh’ for? Over.”

“Um,” hesitated “Asakusa” before finally answering. “I have determined your gravitational control is superior to mine. Over.”

“Judge. It is my duty to support all of you, so that is only natural. Over.”

“But,” said Sakai as he moved next to “Musashi” and peered in at the sign frame displaying “Asakusa”. “Is there some kind of a problem with ‘Musashi’-san controlling the ship?”

“Judge. ‘Musashi’-sama is generally managing all of Musashi’s ships at all times. Of course, that is the job of her main body, the Integrated Decision Reactor inside Musashino’s bridge, but her artificial intelligence as an automaton is constantly working at full power as the foundation of all our various decisions. Over.”

“Really? Then even now, are you keeping the Musashi afloat and managing the various functions across the ship?”

“Judge.” “Musashi” nodded. “Musashi is a floating city and it requires strict

management to pay for that floating power with taxes. I am constantly managing the state of every nook and cranny, from the sewers to the undersides of the passageways and vital part. Over.”

“Then are you monitoring when I sleep?”

“It is not my job to monitor the Principal who possesses the right to manage the Musashi. And I also omit that sort of work when it comes to those I have decided are trustworthy. Over.”

“Then what do you with the people other than me?”

“I generally monitor their physical condition and location. If anything is unclear or suspicious, I can either send in the guards or request a divine protection from their shrine. The weight management of the ships also allows me to instantly locate any stowaways. Over.”

“Umm, then do you manage my health?”

“Is there a problem with ‘Okutama’, the others, or me providing you with three meals a day? Over.”

“You do do that, don’t you?” Sakai placed his *kiseru* in his mouth. However, “Oh, I just like the feel of it in my mouth. I’m not smoking it.”

“You have yet to eat, so I am aware. ...Now, ‘Asakusa’, what problem is there with me controlling the ship? With the Musashi’s power, multitasking is a simple matter. Over.”

“Um, ‘Musashi’-sama, I would not mind answering in a clean state, but I believe there will be noise. Over.”

“Noise? Over.”

“Asakusa” thought for a moment about that question from “Musashi.”

“Umm.” She briefly looked to Sakai. “This will never end otherwise, so let’s try a practical demonstration. ‘Musashi’-sama, I am about to launch another sword, so make sure it lands in the same place as the last one. Over.”

“Musashi” replied with “judge” while spreading the breakfast out on the table next to her. The transported bento box contained bamboo containers fixed to a heating pallet and ‘Musashi’ opened them to reveal grilled fish, pickled

vegetables, and miso soup. She placed steaming rice in a bowl and set down an egg and some chopsticks.

“Here, Sakai-sama.”

“Judge. Thank you very much.”

Sakai exaggeratedly brought his hands together in thanks and then began eating. At that very moment, a dry bursting sound came from up ahead to port. “Asakusa” had launched a large sword.

The sword was difficult to see despite its size and “Musashi” watched Sakai with her hands folded in front of her waist instead of looking back. Sakai cracked the egg on the side of a small bowl and glanced up at her.

“Are you sure this is okay, ‘Musashi’-san?”

“I have locked onto it. This will not be a problem. Over.”

“Musashi” nodded and so did Sakai. And as he stirred up the egg with the chopsticks...

“Oh, soy sauce.”

He looked up and reached for the soy sauce pitcher on the table.

At the same time, “Musashi” also reached over. As a result, their fingers tangled together in front of the pitcher.

“Oh,” said Sakai.

“Oh, dear,” said “Musashi”.

And immediately afterwards, the large sword stabbed into the center of the table, right in front of their hands.

“Waaahh!!”

Sakai grabbed the automaton’s hand and pulled it back from the sword that continued to vibrate even after piercing diagonally through the table.

It had not hit them, but ‘Asakusa’ was glaring from the sign frame.

“That is what I mean. Do you understand now, ‘Musashi’-sama? Over.”

“Judge.”

“Musashi” calmly nodded and pulled the sword from the table.

“That is within the margin of error. Over.”

“Refusing to admit your mistake, ‘Musashi’-sama? Could you talk some sense into her, Sakai-sama? Over.”

“Well, uh...”

Sakai let go of “Musashi” and turned his hand palm up. He glanced to the side and “Musashi” placed the soy sauce pitcher in his hand. She had grabbed it with her gravitational control when the sword fell.

He poured some of the small porcelain container’s contents on the egg bowl as he answered “Asakusa”.

“I’m used to this sort of thing.”

“Are you used to them because of ‘Musashi’-sama? Over.”

“No, because of my friends back home. Although lately I haven’t seen them even when we go to Mikawa.”

“Do you mean Honda Tadakatsu-sama and the rest of Matsudaira’s Four Heavenly Kings? Over.”

“Have you ever met any of them, ‘Asakusa’?”

“No,” said “Asakusa” and “Musashi” together. But “Musashi” continued, “To help accomplish work in Mikawa and understand the area, some automatons are sent to Mikawa when we stop at the land port there. We have received their shared memories of Mikawa. The memories must be converted to make up for differences between automaton models, but that information includes...”

“Is there any from the years I didn’t see them?”

“Judge. If you make a request, I can use the bridge’s data processing to playback an artificial video. Shall I do so? Over.”

“No, you don’t have to. It’s not like I’ll never see them again. But I bet it would be interesting if ‘Asakusa’ or ‘Shinagawa’ met Kazuno.”

“Kazuno... That is the head maid automaton that works for the Honda family, isn’t it? A unique model. Over.”

“Right, right.”

Sakai roughly poured the egg on the rice bowl. After drawing some dark brown stripes, he pushed down the front portion with the chopsticks to reveal the untouched rice below. He stuck the chopsticks beyond the untouched portion, used that to push the rice forward, tilted the bowl toward his mouth, and brought it to his back teeth.

After chewing a bit, he swallowed.

“Ah, this is good stuff.”

“The egg is from a Nagoya chicken. That supply will likely be used up during the Gagaku Festival. Over.”

“What about the soy sauce?”

“I don’t mean to brag, but I made it myself. You are a busy man, so I refine some low-salt soy sauce below Musashino. Once I remove the bitter flavor from the recipe I am testing on you, I should be able to sell it to the general public. Over.”

“I see.” Sakai nodded a few times. “Am I being managed?”

“Even if I think it is a perfect batch, you will fall silent if you find it to be even slightly unpleasant, so I believe you are the one indirectly managing me. Over.”

“Am I that selfish?”

“... Over.”

“Sakai-sama, please stop provoking ‘Musashi’-sama. Over.”

But then “Asakusa” sighed as an artificial expression of emotion and she spoke with her usual expressionless look.

“I am receiving some records concerning Kazuno-sama. They are not much, but I can estimate that she is an expert at close-quarters combat using gravitational control. Over.”

“Yeah, the gravitational control is really more of a way to support her real

skill. I mean, she was originally...oh, whoops. If I say that, Da-chan might kill me. But, well...Oku, who used to hang out with us, would do things just like that flying sword back when she was alive.”

“Are you sure you are not altering your memories as humans are wont to do? Over.”

“‘Asakusa’. Over.”

“Musashi” stating her name shut “Asakusa” up and “Musashi” bowed toward Sakai.

“My subordinate went too far. Over.”

“No, no. I was just wondering the same thing myself. But, y’know what?” said Sakai. “One of our second years, who doesn’t even hold an official position, jumped down from Musashino’s bridge, right?”

“The other day, he tried to swing down from Shinagawa’s derrick, lost control, and crashed into the side of Musashino’s bow. He has an excellent entertainer’s spirit. Over.”

“Yeah, but that isn’t all. ...We’ve even got some kids who defeated some dragons.”

“What are you hoping for, Sakai-sama? If you ask me, peace would be best. Over.”

“Yeah,” said Sakai again before swallowing some more of the rice mixture in the bowl. “People often alter their memories to take a kinder view of the past, but what about the future? When viewed from the future, do we take a kinder view of the inevitable present than we should?”

In the sky, they could hear the delivery workers beginning their morning work after eating breakfast. Sakai raised the corners of his mouth as he listened to them soaring through the wind and flying every which way in that cramped sky.

“Now, then.” He held his right palm out toward “Musashi”. “I’m not done eating yet, but I’d like some tea, ‘Musashi’-san. They’re doing the physical examination at the academy today, so it’s no boys allowed. That means I have no choice but to take it easy out here.”

Asama was in the morning classroom.

There were three rows of desks and Asama's seat was in the middle row. That put it a bit back from the front.

Mitotsudaira's seat was by the window to her left and Kimi could sit behind Mitotsudaira if she used an unused desk.

"I'd like to go through with the strategy meeting we couldn't do at the spring."

"You seem a little out of it."

"And whose fault is that?"

She was not actually drunk, but her body's core felt a little lacking. The sake's purification was washing away a lot inside her. She had considered using a spell to fix it, but it was harmless and it would go away with time.

...And if it comes to it, I can always fix it with the hair of the dog!

Not even she knew why that idea excited her so much, but it was always good to have something to look forward to. And...

"Mito, are you okay?"

"Nn~. I'm still a little woozy."

The silver wolf was leaning back a bit in her chair and that stirred up a protective instinct in Asama, but the Cerberus on her head seemed worried about its master.

"..."

It would occasionally growl at those around her, so it may have seen itself as a guard dog. They had pampered the thing at Takao yesterday, but it seemed to know the proper pecking order.

Good girl, Asama thought of both the wolf and Cerberus before focusing to the left.

"Did it not affect you, Kimi?"

“An athlete gets drunk fast, but they sober fast too.”

She was perfectly fine. She smiled a little while resting her head in her hand and staring at Asama.

“You two should increase your basic exercise load to improve your actual body instead of relying on divine protections. You don’t want to realize how much you’ve slipped during the physical examination today, do you?”

But, well...

“I was a little careless. Sorry about that. ...So what should we do about the strategy meeting? Get it done real quick here?”

If Kimi was inviting them to do that, then *doing so was a good idea.* However...

“Why?”

“Heh heh. Well, you see, there are a few things we lack. If we’re going to gather those things while also practicing, I think we should get it done afterschool today.”

“A few things we lack? ...Like what?”

“Judge.” Kimi nodded. “There are three things.”

Kimi looked back and forth between Asama and Mitotsudaira who had tensed up a little.

“First, instruments.”

“Didn’t we check in the Asama Shrine’s storeroom yesterday?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Even if we have the actual instruments, we still have to see what happens after we tune them and actually play them, right? Old instruments are sometimes not practical because they work fine for the first song, but they have to be tuned again for the second or third song.”

That was true. String instruments in particular could have the strings loosen and the sound would deteriorate after a few songs.

They had seen plenty of instruments at the Asama Shrine the day before. They had all been on the level of antiques, so while they had tested some of them out, they would have to play several songs in a public place as well as use them over and over in practice.

...What will happen then?

Gagaku tended to end after playing a single song and musical instruments were handled with extreme care during Shinto rituals.

But at the Gagaku Festival, they would have to play several songs in a row. And Kimi would also be dancing, so they had to take a rough, high-speed playing style into account. And in that case...

"We will be managing our instruments individually. That isn't easy, you know?"

"You mean someone might try to steal them since they belong to the Asama Shrine?"

Kimi shook her head at Mitotsudaira's question.

"I'm talking about something much simpler: They can sometimes break even inside their case."

But...

"That's just the way it is, so you have to be prepared to deal with it if it happens. I'm just saying it would be nice to have instruments that can withstand that kind of usage."

"Then what's the next thing?"

"Judge," replied Kimi. "The three of us need to practice together. Naito and Naruze are having difficulty with that one too."

"What? I heard my name."

Naruze turned their way, so Kimi nodded back at her.

"When the two of you perform together, how you present yourselves is a real challenge, isn't it?"

"It'll be three people for you, right?"

That was obviously true, but...

...She's saying she knows from experience that it will be an even greater challenge for us.

That was what Naruze's line meant. When Asama and Mitotsudaira realized that, they exchanged a glance. Asama spoke quietly so the rest of the class would not hear.

"Have the three of us ever done anything together like that?"

"There was that folk dance back in sixth grade."

"Oh, that was the Genghis Khan Dance, wasn't it? I remember the Testament description being pretty vague. Something like, 'There is no evidence this was actually danced in the original era'. But that's pretty common for folk dances."

"Judge. There's also the Oklahoma Mixer that's only mentioned in the notes on the New World. The name alone isn't enough to know what kind of dance it is, but it was described as the 'sudden impact' style, which only made it more of a mystery. ...And during elementary school, the boys started playing a game they called the Oklahoma Mixer and it was pretty dangerous, so at morning assembly they issued an official 'Ban on the Oklahoma Mixer'. Do you remember that, Mito and Kimi?"

"I do, I do."

Asama remembered it quite well, too.

"But," sighed Asama. "Those dances are fine, but we're Shinto and we don't even do the *bon* dance during temple festivals..."

"Heh heh. A band that does folk dances and the *bon* dance on stage!? Now that would be popular!!"

Despite what she said, Kimi was worried about their future.

...They really need some training.

But they were motivated, so they would probably manage somehow. Still, that left the final problem.

"And the third thing."

Asama and Mitotsudaira moved their gazes and foreheads toward her, so Kimi paused to raise their expectations and answered with a smile.

"We have our academic exams during the preparatory period, but if we fail any of them, we have to take a supplementary exam during the festival."

And just to be clear...

"I can be pretty capricious."

Oh, that's right, thought Asama.

"You're not allowed to fail, Kimi."

"Heh heh heh."

"No, not 'heh heh heh'...! Mito, you say something to her!"

"Judge," said Mitotsudaira. "This is a pain, so let's make a deal, Kimi. A deal to get you to study."

"Eh? What'll it be? It takes many offerings to placate the goddess of beauty!"

"Then...Tomo will give you sweets every day, so go study at the Asama Shrine every day."

"Eh!? Me!? I have to do it!?"

They ignored her. And...

"Heh heh." Kimi laughed and bent backwards. "That isn't going to cut it."

"Then," said Mitotsudaira. That word filled Asama with hope.

...Is Mito going to bring sweets, too!?

Asama had quite liked the crepe she had eaten the day before. It was fattening, though.

For the next few days, she would look after Kimi while saying "Oh, I'm going to gain weight" but still eating the Far Eastern sweets at the shrine along with the Western sweets Mitotsudaira brought over. That was how things tended to be in the lead up to a festival.

...It's like Shinto heaven...!

"Tomo will wash you at Suzu's bathhouse every day."

"Wh-why me? You wash her, Mito!"

"Using me is a last resort."

"...Y'know."

It was Naito that spoke to them. She was using a spell pen to censor Naruze's manuscript displayed on a crop mark frame Magie Figur.

"Ga-chan and I use Suzu's Bath every day, so that would just be a nuisance for us."

Asama gave a deep nod in response.

"Right? Using our bubbly bodies to wash each other would just be terribly inappropriate, wouldn't it?"

"No, not that. Just having you there would mean Ga-chan could never finish her storyboard and the new book would never actually be released."

"Margot... I'm sorry... But I'm at an age where I can't help but leap at any good material I see."

When will she reach a calmer age?

"By the way," said Asama. "Is it just me, or is that me I see on that manuscript there?"

"It's fine."

"Is it?"

"It's fine."

"Is it not?"

"It's fine."

"W-wait, please give me a serious answer, Naruze!"

"What does it really matter?" asked a voice behind her.

She looked back and found the idiot girl had spread out a magazine insert on the desk. It was labeled "Musashi Sweets Map". And she breathed a few nasal laughs.

Kimi faced Mitotsudaira.

“So when will you play your final card?”

Adele looked away from the commotion caused by the three girls behind her.

They always seem to be having fun, she thought just like yesterday, but she was busy herself with the vassal unit’s public training and other things at the spring school festival.

Fun and busy mean the same thing, don’t they? she thought while glancing around the classroom.

...Huh? Was it always this big?

Class 2-Plum was on the third floor of the rear school building. Spring was coming to an end, but the light coming in through the windows was faint and unreliable since it came from the stealth barrier.

The amount of sunlight felt a lot more like dusk, but more of it got in than usual.

She knew why: the boys were not here.

...Just having Persona-kun, Urquiaga-san, and Ohirosiki-san gone changes a lot...

She then began to wonder if it was wrong of her to say it was “just” having those three gone. They were quite significant as far as size was concerned.

Anyway, her seat was near the window, but just by looking across the classroom a bit...

“I can see everything a lot better.”

“I sit in the front row and I haven’t known the rest of you for long, so it’s hard for me to tell...”

That comment came from Masazumi who sat in the seat in front of Adele and was turned back in her seat for once. She looked around at the others in their seats and then faced Adele.

Her well-formed eyebrows could not hide her doubt as she asked a question.

“What are we going to do today?”

“Oh, the physical examination.”

“Now? Although I suppose it is true we haven’t had one yet...”

“Judge,” nodded Adele.

Now that she mentions it, that might be true, she thought, but she understood why.

“Musashi gets people from every nation, but that creates some slight margin of error. We’re generally in Mikawa during April, so that’s when the transfer students arrive. But there are always some that can’t make it to Mikawa.”

“That’s true,” agreed Masazumi. “Mikawa is near the center of P.A. Oda. That makes it a difficult place for Tsirhc people to go.”

“So, well, it’s partially to accommodate Europe, but some people transfer in at around May when Musashi goes to Europe. That’s why we wait until then to do all the events other academies would do at the beginning of spring.”

That was not limited to the physical examination.

“During the preparatory period for the spring school festival, we use the mornings for the physical examination and the educational exams. You probably already know, Masazumi-san, but a lot of this has to do with our bodies and we have to change clothes a lot in preparation for the festival, so Musashi Ariadust Academy is currently split between boys and girls.”

“No, I didn’t know that.” Masazumi smiled a little. “I thought it would be best to learn about the school festivals and events once I got here.”

“Oh, so you’re a hands-on kind of learner.”

“I’m not so sure. I might just be a procrastinator.”

The way she lowered her eyebrows in a smile suggested she could think of an example in her everyday life. *I’m the same,* thought Adele.

“So does that mean there are only girls in the academy during this period?” asked Masazumi.

“The boys use the underground gym and the various branch schools to

change and prepare. If that isn't enough, they'll set up tents on the second schoolyard down below."

"So the girls get all the advantages..."

"If you run for next year's student council, you could probably get a lot of the boys' votes if you demand some changes concerning that."

Masazumi's reaction changed when she heard that. Her smile did not so much disappear as it grew clear.

"-----"

She stared straight at Adele, but not in a disagreeable or hostile way.

"That's an interesting idea."

Masazumi's tone was resolute. *Oh?* thought Adele with a hint of admiration.

...So she isn't denying that she'll be running.

She did not deny it or dodge the issue. Nor did she claim it had nothing to do with her or pass it off as some casual political talk.

It was like she thought such topics were naturally relevant for her.

...Yes.

She was the daughter of a Provisional Councilor. She had worked in the past toward inheriting a name and she had the surname Honda.

Over the past month, Adele had only seen her as a politician's daughter and an excellent student, but this was different.

"Masazumi-san."

"Hm? What is it?"

Masazumi replied with her usual serious expression, but Adele sensed some kindness there. However...

"You hope to be a politician, don't you?"

She asked for confirmation.

That was something everyone already knew. After all, she had mentioned it while introducing herself after transferring in at the start of spring. And when

she had...

“Another influential person in our class!? Are you trying to corner me!?”

“Toori-kun, I won’t ask what you did, but how about you go to the guard station and accept your punishment?”

“Um, Tomo? Isn’t that normally ‘you don’t have to go to the guard station, but how about you tell me what you did’?”

“If you ask me, you try that with him and he’ll just start bragging about his criminal escapades.”

“Then, Uqui-dono, wouldn’t it solve everything if you just punished Toori-dono before he said anything?”

“Ga-chan, Ga-chan, tell me what you just imagined. That’s an impressive nosebleed.”

Toori and the others reacted in the usual way: incomprehensibly.

But given that Masazumi dreamed of becoming a politician, Adele wanted to support her. Their class had a bit of a soft spot for dreams.

And so she had asked about Masazumi’s dream to let her know that. But...

“Ohh...”

Masazumi scratched her head with a troubled look. And then...

“Judge.”

Adele only received that brief response.

Adele was confused by Masazumi’s noncommittal reaction.

...?

Did it mean she was not confident? Or did it mean that was not what she really wanted?

The reaction suggested Adele had touched on a topic she wanted to avoid.

There was a small smile on Masazumi’s face. It was a distancing smile that perfectly matched her short response and hesitant tone.

Unlike before, it was a vague expression that tried to dodge the issue.

...Yeah, this is a really awkward pause...

Adele realized she had probably made too many assumptions about Masazumi's character. Hoping to be a politician and being a politician were two different things. That was obvious, but Adele had not understood the emotions contained there.

That had been a mistake.

She dug back through her memories and realized that Masazumi had only briefly touched on this topic while introducing herself at the start of spring.

And that was why Toori had followed up on it.

Asama's precise but cruel finishing blow would have been for the same reason. Asama had been in charge of inspecting Masazumi when she boarded, so she had likely understood all that.

But...

"Sorry."

"Eh?"

"Hoping to be a politician isn't that easy, is it? I shouldn't have brought it up so casually."

"Eh? No, um, I was the one that told everyone about it."

But...

"It's true it isn't easy. I can believe it will happen just fine, but when other people say it too...how should I put it? I guess I feel more responsibility? There isn't actually any, but I feel like I won't be able to live up to that."

"Oh."

Adele understood. If someone else asked her and she said yes, then it would become a lie if she did not make it happen.

...Yeah.

She takes things really seriously, thought Adele.

...And she hides it within herself.

She had said it while introducing herself to provide a consensus, but she had not made it a part of her identity yet. She hid it inside herself and simply believed in it. That was Masazumi's true form at the moment.

Adele hoped Masazumi did not think she had been teasing her for that, but she felt that defending herself any further would only be for self-satisfaction. *I'd only be justifying my actions by apologizing.*

So Adele said something else instead.

"If you ever need something, just say so. We all love helping out."

"Judge. That's been pretty obvious."

Masazumi nodded, so Adele decided that was good enough and breathed a sigh of relief. And then...

"Okay, okay. Are you all here, girls?"

The classroom door opened and a voice called in.

It was Oriotorai in her track suit. She held an attendance sheet and a bundle of charms, both of which she placed on the teacher's desk.

"Now, the boys will be heading down this morning and working hard on the spring school festival preparations. We, on the other hand, will spend the morning on the physical examination in here. We have plenty of time this year, so the health exam will be on a different day, so don't feel rushed. But we will swap out with the boys in the afternoon, so don't be too slow."

"Judge," said Adele and the others.

Oriotorai then turned Adele's way. No, she was technically facing Masazumi.

And she spoke to Masazumi.

"Do you have a track suit?"

Masazumi felt her pulse racing, but she also felt relief.

When Oriotorai faced her, she had honestly thought the teacher was going to

say something about her body.

...Because I tried to become a boy for the inherited name, but never finished the process.

That was necessary information for the physical examination and it could be a bit of a sticking point for Masazumi.

So she had thought Oriotorai was going to mention that up front: Can you take the physical examination?

That had happened several times at Mikawa already. Each time, she had said she could.

She knew they were trying to be considerate, but...

“Oh, yes, judge, I do!”

This was the first time she had to answer this question.

And that may have been why she answered a little too forcefully.

“Oh, that’s good,” said their homeroom teacher. “So you won’t have to borrow someone else’s?”

“Sensei, is anyone in our class the same size as Masazumi?”

That blunt question came from Naruze. *Musashi is from Matsudaira, so does her name come from the Naruse clan?* wondered Masazumi as the Non-Fallen Angel looked across the others.

“Asama...is out of the question. Why did I even look at her? Probably for the joke. Yeah...”

“What kind of roundabout rejection was that!?”

“Now, now,” said Heidi before smiling over at Masazumi. “If you ever need something, I’ll lend it to you!”

“No, thanks. Borrowing from you would leave me indebted in more ways than one.”

“Then what about mine?” asked Mitotsudaira. But...

...Wait, wait, wait. A future politician borrowing a track suit from the first in

line to ruling the Far East!?

She felt it was a personal failing that she was not decisive enough to think of this as an opportunity. But the Aoi Sister, who was sitting behind Mitotsudaira, tapped on her shoulder through her hair.

“You can’t, Mitotsudaira. Masazumi has a surprisingly big butt.”

“Oh, I see... Wait, what does that say about me!?”

Do I? wondered Masazumi. *Maybe it only doesn't feel restrained because I wear boy's pants*, she thought. Regardless, it seemed no one here matched her body type.

...Well, I have one, so it isn't that much of a problem.

Just as she gave a mental nod of self-satisfaction about her own preparedness, Mukai suddenly spoke up.

“Toori-kun’s would...fit. Probably.”

“Huh?”

Masazumi expressed confusion at Mukai’s unexpected comment.

But Mukai only blushed a little and nodded.

“Yes.”

That seemed to be the end of her explanation, so Masazumi felt left behind.

...What was that about that idiot?

She had an intensely bad feeling about this and the others decided to prove her right.

“Oh, yeah. I bet his would fit. I agree.”

“She’s a little stiffer, but I guess the base is about the same. And Masazumi has long legs, so she would only have to adjust the top.”

“That is certainly unexpected, but it might actually work...”

And as they all started agreeing, Adele joined in.

"If Suzu-san says so, then it must be true."

"R-really?"

"Judge. Suzu-san has always been good at sewing and she even tailors her own uniform. So when I buy used clothes, I always get Suzu-san to retailor it for me."

That's an unexpected talent, thought Masazumi, but she had another question.

"Um..."

She had a feeling this was a dangerous question and she had already heard about the likely answer, but she asked anyway.

"Why...Aoi's?"

"Oh, Toori-san crossdresses, so he's sure to have at least a track suit."

...Do you not find that at least a little odd!?

Or was this an old habit of his?

Whether he was being a nudist or crossdresser, she could only say there was something wrong with him, but in this class – and probably in Musashi as a whole – people just seemed to accept it.

When she thought about it, she realized the falling nudist had not caused a big to-do the night before. She had checked the newspaper and it had only been given as additional information concerning the Hidden Dragon extermination: "Last night, the Chancellor and a nudist fell from a ship in the sky above Musashino's bridge, but they were unharmed."

He could do such ridiculous things, but no one made a big deal out of it.

That may have been Musashi's nature as the only official Far Eastern territory.

There had been nothing like this at Mikawa. In fact, there was no real way to fall from that kind of height there.

At Mikawa, the worst you came across was the training for the Atsuta Shrine's prayer song attack. Two competitors would sing adlibbed songs and if your opponent's adlibbing ended first, you were free to punch them.

There were a lot of mysterious phenomena in Mikawa, but looking back, it had been a lot safer...no, saner.

...Yes, Mikawa wasn't exactly safe.

After all, her mother had disappeared due to one of the mysterious phenomena in Mikawa. That was what had led to her coming to Musashi, but it was also why she had trouble feeling proud of her hometown after arriving here.

...But while it may be safer here, it's really abnormal.

She was sometimes asked to tell stories from her life back at Mikawa, but whenever she did they would only respond with some light agreement and understanding: "Sounds like Mikawa has its own troubles."

Naruze had said, "That story needs more of a punch," and Naito had tried to rebuke her: "Don't say that, Ga-chan. Seijun is doing her best to fit in."

...But thinking back, that might be when I did start to fit in more...

The Seijun nickname was something that idiot started without meaning to, wasn't it? she recalled before speaking to the others.

"Anyway, everyone, I have a track suit, so I'll be fine. I've only been sitting out of gym class because it hadn't arrived yet. If you need help with any of the preparations, just call me over."

"Judge," they all agreed. Naomasa looked up and groaned in thought, so she might have been figuring out where she could use Masazumi.

The others seemed to view her as one of them more than she had thought.

But there was one thing that came to mind here.

...I'll probably get a much better picture of these things during the festival and all the preparations.

She would be able to see how the various people acted and what happened afterwards.

She had seen a lot of it already. For example...

"Asama, will you three be busy preparing for the Gagaku Festival?"

Asama quickly looked up when Masazumi asked her a question.

...Ah.

Oh, no. I wasn't paying attention.

The sign frame in front of her was why. It displayed the band ideas that Kimi had sent her and it was their most important task at the moment.

She thought it was wrong to bring their personal time into the classroom, but she also thought it was fine since this was for an academy event. However, she had taken it too far if she had lost track of the conversation.

Masazumi's question had not reached her ears. "Umm," she said while trying to figure out what to say, but then a post appeared on the experimental divine chat that she was testing out with a special connection.

Wise Sister: "Asama, over here."

Hoping for a hint, she turned around. Kimi opened the chest of her own uniform and stuck a handkerchief between her boobs.

Wise Sister: "Look, a tissue box."

Relying on a crazy person had been a mistake. So...

"Um, sorry, I wasn't listening. What is it, Masazumi?"

"Eh? Oh, I was only checking on your current situation."

...My current situation?

She looked to Kimi who nodded with her eyebrows lying flat. She then grabbed the straw paper printout containing the day's schedule and stuck it in her cleavage.

"A shredder."

The straw paper was sucked down into her cleavage, so Uzy was probably pulling on it from below.

More than the joke, it was imagining Uzy's effort that did it.

"Pff."

"Ah, she laughed! She laughed! ...Masazumi! This is what it looks like when someone laughs at your joke!"

"I don't know what this is about and I don't particularly care, but why would you think no one ever laughs at my jokes?"

"_____"

Dead silence.

No one said a thing and Asama felt it was the teacher's job to break that silence, but...

...Sensei.

She looked up at Oriotorai who was using a sign frame to place a delivery order for lunch.

She was completely ignoring everything.

...Sensei?

Questioning their teacher's abandonment of her duties would accomplish nothing. This much was to be expected. If Asama did not think of it that way, her mind would never survive intact.

That meant she was the one who had to help the room's atmosphere recover.

But breaking a silence was a dangerous act if she thought of it in terms of *kotodama*. The words she sent into that silent space would determine the atmosphere from then on.

And everyone understood that it was a shrine maiden's job to do such things safely, so...

...Um.

The safest option was, "Let's start the physical examination."

But that did not seem entirely accurate. They had to change first.

"_____"

This is surprisingly difficult, she realized.

That was when she saw Kimi reach for the paper being sucked into her chest

and pull on the top to retrieve it. But the internal pressure was too great and the paper's movement caused her breasts to swell up above the shirt portion. As a result, the chest band slipped below her breasts and the bare chest parted the shirt portion like peeling two grapes.

"Oh, dear."

In order to stop them from being fully bared, Asama frantically raised her voice.

"Mito! Take care of Kimi's boobs!"

...Ehh!?

Mitotsudaira had partially turned back toward Kimi to discuss the Gagaku Festival. That left her turned to the side and facing Asama, so the other girl's words scored a direct hit.

A shrine maiden's words were absolute when it came to creating an "atmosphere" out of silence. And when that shrine maiden was the #2 of the Asama Shrine and Musashi's Shinto representative, Mitotsudaira could not just ignore it as the provisional name inheritor of Mito Matsudaira.

So she quickly took action.

"Kimi!"

She reached out on reflex to hide Kimi's boobs.

The clothing had not fully left her breasts, so she moved to grab the collar and hold it together.

...This will work!

But just as she thought that, Kimi did something, perhaps in an attempt to be considerate.

"Here."

She got up and mischievously leaned on top of the silver wolf.

By the time the term "counter boobs" came to mind, the distance between them had shifted.

...Ah.

Oh, no, she thought as her hands nearly passed by below Kimi's breasts. She made a quick course correction, sending her hands further upwards, and...

"Ahn."

Kimi cried out and Mitotsudaira realized her ten fingers were digging into Kimi's boobs.

...What is this!?

Mitotsudaira's first impression was a shout.

She had tried to support Kimi from below as the girl leaned onto her, so Kimi was completely draped over her, even if there was a desk between them.

Kimi had lost her balance, so she loosely wrapped her arms around Mitotsudaira's head to support herself.

"Ahhn, oh, you're so cute, Troiko...!"

...Is this any time to be loving on my Cerberus!?

That said, the three-dimensional masses in front of her eyes were far too monochrome. She was just barely holding the cloth in place so it did not come off, but that applied extra pressure which caused a part (or rather, two parts) of Kimi's body to change shape.

They were entirely deserving of certain choice sound effects.

They were huge. She could see why Kimi was known as the runner up after Asama in Class Plum's boobs caste system. Seeing them like this proved how huge they were. Groping them like this proved even more how huge they were.

They sometimes looked bigger than Asama's, but she now understood how that worked. Kimi must have been a lot more fit due to dancing, so the top of her breasts swelled out in a larger curve.

Looking at pure volume, Asama would win out.

But Asama's had a somewhat downward-facing volume due to their own weight. Viewed three-dimensionally, they stuck out to the front and were more

focused on the bottom.

But Kimi's swelled out at the top, so they had an excellent three-dimensional shape on the top and the bottom. That accentuated the breasts more and made them look bigger than Asama's.

...Shape fraud!?

No, you can't call it fraud when they really are this big. In a way, Tomo is the one guilty of shape fraud because hers lull you into a false sense of security and then reveal themselves to be even bigger than they looked. However...

"...!"

Mitotsudaira realized that their shape could make them look big even if they were small.

...I won't point out that it doesn't actually change their size!

After that quick self-tsukkomi, Mitotsudaira began estimating what kind of shape she would need to make her breasts look big.

"..."

It was not possible.

Without voluminous weapons on Kimi's level, it simply was not possible. So to gain that appearance of extra volume, you needed some foundational volume to start with.

To put it another way, making your boobs look bigger was a privilege of the big ones.

You needed a starting sum if you were to earn more.

...Heh...heh heh. Am I talking about investing all of a sudden?

God, please give me a starting sum of boobs. She knew more or less where this was going to end if she was thinking that, so she stopped trying to gather her thoughts and ejected them from her mind. All that remained was...

"Kwah wah wah wah."

The skin color in front of her eyes had not resolved itself while she was indulging in escapism.

...Hyahhh!!

She realized anew just how huge they were. Just like with Asama, even one of them was more than wide enough to cover both her eyes at once. They would only be an obstacle in battle, but she was fairly certain Kimi's dances included defensive techniques.

Did that mean those were techniques born from figuring out how to protect her entire body despite those breast obstacles?

I can't beat the busty. I thought that yesterday too, but...y-yes, there's just nothing I can do... Wh-what is with me lately? I keep crying.

At any rate, this was not the time to be groping and supporting some giant boobs.

For one thing, it was morning homeroom. She could not keep doing this forever, so to create an opening between them, Mitotsudaira raised her eyebrows and...

“W-wait, Kimi!”

To break them apart, she pushed with both hands against the masses in front of her eyes.

...Wait, no!

She gasped as she remembered the mental scars she had suffered yesterday when she tried to push back and her fingers had dug in so deeply.

She was currently up against the Kimi version of that shock-absorbing booby armor. So...

“Kh.”

Since she did not want to push, she reflexively did the opposite and pulled. That was a mistake.

Kimi's altitude quickly lowered.

The sudden action must have caught her by surprise.

“Eh?”

With a rare voice of confusion, Kimi entrusted herself to Mitotsudaira.

Mitotsudaira did not want to just let them both collapse. Her hips bent back a fair ways, but she managed to support Kimi.

...B-back to the original idea!

She pushed.

Her fingers dug in.

...Nh.

It's different, concluded the silver wolf based on the sensation surrounding her fingers.

This was different from yesterday.

With Asama, her fingers had softly dug in and the flesh had flowed out.

With Kimi, the flesh pushed out between her fingers like it was about to burst.

I, Nate Mitotsudaira, am becoming a real connoisseur, she thought, but...

“M-Mito! Why do you keep losing yourself in thought each time you move a little!?”

“B-because I am a philosopher! Probably!”

At any rate, the most important task at hand was to push Kimi back, so she pushed with her entire body. And...

“Ah, you idiot, don't push on the outside.”

“Eh?”

Not properly holding the spheres from the center had been a mistake.

She was still holding the two sides of the collar, which slipped along the outside of Kimi's skin and forced her arms to spread to either side.

As a result, Kimi's breasts were fully bared, Mitotsudaira's arms were spread wide, and...

“Ahn.”

Kimi let out a sweet cry as she fell between Mitotsudaira's arms as a counterattack.

Mitotsudaira was aware her face was buried between those two breasts.

They both froze in place, Mitotsudaira with Kimi's arms around her head and her own arms loosely around Kimi.

Mitotsudaira's face was buried in that resilience, heat, dampness, and pulse.

...Oh, I can actually breathe fairly well.

She tried to calm herself. How was she supposed to escape this blatantly abnormal situation? She commanded herself to come up with an answer and soon.

Then she heard Kimi's voice.

"Oh, c'mon. Were you that desperate for some boobs? You're so spoiled, Mitotsudaira."

Heh heh.

"They're yours to do with as you wish. So what do you want to do?"

"I want to cryyyyy!!"

Chapter 2: Insufficient One at a Half Place

第二章

『半分場の足りない者』



足りてる方が異常
そんな言い訳も
高等部になりますとね……
配点 (過去からの累積)

The sufficient ones are the abnormal ones

To think I would

Still be using that excuse in high school...

Point Allocation (Accumulation from the Past)

“Hey, Tenzou.”

The morning air still hung over the road as a voice joined the sounds of wooden hammers striking stakes and of light gods of war moving around.

“What is our class going to do for the spring festival?”

“That is a good question since our usual supplier, Shirojiro-dono, is focusing all his attention on the Marube-ya.”

That response came from Tenzou who was working with Toori to set up a tent for the Far Eastern Academy Store on the central road below the academy.

“Well, we still have Ohirosiki-dono and Hassan-dono, so we should have plenty of sweets and curry.”

“Isn’t eating curry with sweets kind of revolutionary?”

“They apparently eat yogurt after curry in India.”

“So it’s actually doable, huh? Asama’s in the tea ceremony club, so if we get some tea from her, I guess we’ll be set for food and drink.”

Tenzou faced Toori who was tying on the tent’s canvas roof. And while he adjusted the height of one of the main support poles, Tenzou said, “It’s too bad you can’t run the shop this time, Toori-dono.”

“Well, after what happened last time, they’ve banned anyone from starting consecutive events.”

“Yeah, that play café you ran last year was something else. First Mitotsudaira-dono brings a real sword for a prop, then it flies into the audience seating, and in the end you were arrested.”

“That was so not fair.”

"Judge. The guards took one look at Adele-dono and said a girl that small could never throw a sword that large. But Adele-dono can do that easily and she didn't really throw it; it slipped from her hand. It has a different grip than her spear, after all."

But...

"I think the real problem was when you shouted 'That's right! I did it!!', held the sword in your crotch, and chased the guards around with it. Unlike the chocolate way back when, I'm amazed it didn't slip out."

"Well, I had a spare gravitational control charm from setting up the place. And if you don't use it all, they'll cut your budget the following year."

"By breaking the regulations, you just about had the entire thing eliminated, not just the budget."

But more importantly...

"I know it's way too late now, but did you ever apologize to Mitotsudaira-dono?"

"She muttered 'My heirloom...' with a blank look on her face, so I said 'Your heirloom preserved our honor'. But that only made her give me one hell of a glare, so I had Shiro teach me how to prostrate in apology. She took it back saying she would have it cleaned, but then a crazy expensive bill arrived later on and I had to increase my part-time shifts."

"I see."

Tenzou looked at Toori who was leaning back and standing on a chair while tying on the roof canvas.

And after a while...

"Toori-dono."

"Hm? What is it, Tenzou? Is there a problem?"

"Judge." Tenzou nodded. "Why...are you crossdressing?"

Tenzou looked up at the idiot who was leaning back and standing on a chair.

Frighteningly enough...

“The scary part is that you really do look like a girl.”

“Yeah, figuring out what to do with my dick was a real pain.”

“Please don’t bring that up out of the blue!!”

“It turned out stealth just wasn’t enough, so I’m using a technique to store it in a pocket dimension.”

*I must avoid thinking he should use that passion for something more useful.
He is an entertainer.*

There is no helping it. But...

“Why are you dressed up as a busty blonde?”

“Huh? You can’t tell? I felt sorry for you, so I had no choice but to go with the busty blondes you love so much.”

“Oh, how considerate of you. Thank-...”

Tenzou trailed off before saying “you”.

“I-I don’t want that kind of consideration!”

“Eh? R-really? Do you hate busty blondes now?”

“I love busty blondes! I rented a video yesterday, waited until my parents left in the morning, and watched it before coming here!”

“So if your faith is real, then why aren’t you reacting to my busty blonde? Oh, is it that thing where you don’t notice the charm of someone who you take for granted!? That’s it, isn’t it?”

“That would never happen, so don’t even try to suggest it! Besides, Tooridono, if you hang around me looking like that, a busty blonde with a crush on me might say ‘Oh, Tenzou-kun is already dating a busty blonde. Sob.’, and cry with her breasts between her arms like this! Then I would lose a chance at love!”

“So what should we do for lunch?”

“You just ignored all of that, didn’t you!?”

“Just think about it. No busty blonde is ever going to have a crush on you.”

“B-back in elementary school, I would’ve punched you for saying that!”

“And now?”

“Now I think you’re probably right.”

The two of them laughed together and then Tenzou came back to his senses.

“I don’t want this. It will keep other busty blondes away and you’re actually a guy, so I gain nothing at all from it.”

“Don’t say that. You can just look at me and imagine I’m the ideal busty blonde. And I don’t think you’ll need much of an imagination there. I mean, check out this ass.”

Toori stuck his butt out from above and there was indeed nothing wrong with the shape visible through the gap between the side skirt and tail skirt. The color of the white panties portion was also quite nice.

“...This is dangerous. If I was a 1st *dan* in *shudo*, I would have definitely challenged you to a match.”

“Hmm, so you’re saying this sinful body of mine lights a criminal flame in people’s hearts...”

“But,” said Tenzou. “Why the crossdressing?”

“Oh, right.”

The idiot looked up toward the academy.

The ceiling was gaining the color of later morning. And below that, the crossdresser faced the school building illuminated by the faint light of the stealth barrier.

“So I can peep.”

Immediately afterwards, Tenzou saw something.

The crossdresser’s head was blown away.

“Toori-dono!”

He had been sniped.

"How about it, Ga-chan? Did I hit him?"

Naito asked that of Naruze while aiming her broom out of a third floor window in the academy's rear building.

Naruze was outside the window. She used her wings to float and checked the guideline drawn from the end of the broom. The broom was aimed at a somewhat upwards angle in order to clear the front building and the ether line drew a slight curve from there.

"I think it probably got through. I took our relative positions and his height into consideration, so it should have blown away just his wig."

Yes.

"Wigs are expensive. Blow away that and he probably won't think about peeping for a while."

"I see," said Asama inside the building, but then a sign frame appeared next to her.

Asama sighed, suggesting it was the sniper victim himself. She then spoke to the sign frame.

"Um, Toori-kun? When you were arrested by the guards due to your nonsense early this morning, they placed a marker on you. So if you say or do anything dumb right now, I will be informed. They want me to nip it in the bud before you get arrested again. ...Oh, your wig was blown away? You would have preferred getting arrested? Please stop pretending to cry. You're troubling Tenzou-kun."

"They never change, do they?" muttered Naruze.

Naruze thought about what she had just said.

...I guess it means the usual way of things is best.

That idiot could be thoughtful about a lot of things, like that automaton at the Blue Thunder.

The difficult thing about him was how he did not seem to be observing the others while he actually was. The even more difficult thing about him was how his idiocy made it hard to thank him even if something did warrant it.

Margot would casually say thanks, but Naruze just could not do it. Once, when she had forgotten a combination page rough for a doujinshi in the academy store's copier, she had thanked Persona-kun when he brought it to her, but the atmosphere had frozen over and everyone had reacted like this: "Are you having a bad day, Naruze-kun?"

"Naruze-kun, that isn't very in character for you. Are you an imposter? When the real one tries to spin a pen in her right hand...kh, it got caught and wouldn't spin!? It seems you are the real Naruze-kun."

"Um, Naruze-dono... Wait, why do you get your usual look of scorn back when I try to help out!?"

What was with all that?

...Maybe I should just assume it means they understand who I am.

But, she silently added while entering through the classroom window. The light was fairly dim outside, but it was bright compared to the classroom.

...It can't stay like this.

That was how it felt to her.

"Ga-chan?"

Had Margot realized what she was thinking?

Their relationship was not a particularly long one, but it was a very close one. So...

"Judge. It's just a little something."

It was not enough to worry about, but it was not "nothing". That was what she told Margot.

"Okay."

Margot nodded and the doubt vanished from her face.

They did not need to thoroughly question each other about every little thing.

Because they were so close, they could ask for advice at any time and they could embrace each other without forgetting the things they had put off until later.

The way Naruze saw it, if you pretended to be close by resolving everything right away, you were either forced to because you had so little intimate time together or you viewed your relationship as something like a job.

So she passed through the window...

"_____"

...and returned inside.

There was a trick to entering through the window without her wings catching. When she closed her wings, she lost her lift. That would normally turn her wings into nothing but weights, so her body would topple backwards. And if that happened while passing through the window, she could fall outside.

So she would use the closing motion to make a light flap and then scrunch up her body while taking a light step over the windowsill.

She crossed over the desk where the idiot usually slept and she continued on to their seats.

And she looked around the classroom.

"What, are you changing already?"

"Judge. Sensei said she's in charge in the gym, so she left the paperwork here."

Some people had no sign frame contract and used a handheld shrine, so paperwork was a fairly common sight at events like this. *It's nice that the Far East primarily uses paper media*, thought Naruze.

...Maybe I should make a quick sketch.

She began drawing everyone as they changed.

Suzu realized Naruze was occasionally looking her direction while drawing something on a Magie Figur.

Naruze had a certain habit when she began drawing in the classroom.

When she was drawing in serious mode, she would make scratching motions with her right arm, but her left wing would stop moving.

That likely meant she was using the left wing to support herself while her right arm moved her body.

When drawing like that, her right wing would move a bit to match the movements of her right shoulder. The swaying wing looked pleasant, like a baby's toy, but Naruze must have been unaware of her surroundings because it would sometimes hit a passerby.

Of course, everyone would turn toward Naruze when that happened, but they would hold their tongues when they noticed how focused she was.

...That must be nice.

Suzu wished she had something she could get so focused on.

How focused was she while sewing? No, any sound around her would catch her attention, so it could not be that much.

And Naruze was now sketching them all changing, including Suzu herself.

...Yes...

Her parents had really liked the picture Naruze had given her the day before.

“Ho ho?”

That was how their reaction had begun.

“I had heard the rumors, but this – Nargot-san, was it? – is very good.”

“Yes, it’s Nalga-san and Maruze-san.”

...Mom, dad, you’re mixing them together. But they live together, so maybe that’s fine.

She had decided that was within the margin of error and opted not to correct her parents, but should she have done so?

Regardless, she had enjoyed having her friend praised.

It made her happy to have an amazing friend.

...But not because it makes me amazing too.

It made no sense to claim it did. If that logic worked, everyone around Toorikun would be a nudist. So...

...It lets me believe that my life is something different from normal.

With housework, it was easy to just repeat the same things every single day. But with her friends there, she would never forget that there were people who lived different sorts of lives.

She had to wonder if there was no such thing as “ordinary” and everyone had a different idea of what it meant.

That may have been why her parents had stared at Naruze’s drawing for a very long time the night before.

“Is she always drawing things like this?”

“Yes. She says she...actually draws...the backgrounds too.”

“I see... But kids these days sure are mature. This is nothing like the manga when we were kids. It’s a lot more...realistic, I guess? And you look so mature in it, Suzu.”

“Hm? How?”

Her parents had fallen silent, so she had probably asked an awkward question.

They had then whispered to each other.

“...So Suzu is old enough to be seen as an adult.”

“...The artist is a girl too, so I doubt it was meant to be so sexual.”

She had felt a dull sweat soaking her skin, but when she thought about it, Naruze did like girls even if she was a girl. Would it be best to lie?

And after a while longer...

“Suzu. ...If you don’t want to carry on the family business, you can just tell us, okay?”

“Yes, we’re prepared for that.”

"Eh? No, um. That isn't...what Ga-chan meant by...having me dressed like...a Technohexen."

It had not been easy to keep them from starting a family meeting right then and there.

But her parents had touched on her life a bit.

...That was...different from...normal.

What was normal in her life was different from "normal" for her family. And it was different from normal for her to hear their reactions to it.

What was this called? She had a feeling Naruze had mentioned it before...

...Corruption...?

No. Well, that does seem to fit, but probably no.

The word "interaction" came to mind. *Good. I'm glad I didn't give up on thinking.* She realized now just how important words were. And...

"..."

Thanks to her parents' reaction last night, she had a thought about Naruze's sketches.

...Wh-what does it mean...f-for them to be...mature?

Changing isn't all that different for boys and girls, thought Mitotsudaira.

Girls changed their tops just like boys did their shirts and girls changed their tights just like boys did their pants.

Some people changed their top first and some changed their bottom first, but Mitotsudaira was the latter type.

She had a reason for that.

...If I change the bottom first, I can better respond to an attack while changing the top.

It was her legs that mattered. So when changing into a track suit, doing the bottom first would lighten her body sooner.

As a knight, she had to consider the possibility of an enemy attack at any time, and *that* alone was a good enough reason to change the bottom first.

Okay, she said in her heart while reaching into her bag and pulling out tights in a color known as Hexagone Blue.

No girl left their tights in their locker. They were light and could be folded up quite small. And track suit tights were designed to allow sweat through instead of being insulating, so they were not meant to be worn multiple times without washing them.

Thus...

“...Now, then.”

The first step while changing was to bring the front of her skirt together.

She connected the front of the side skirts to close the front and then attached the backs to the tail skirt. By lifting up the top of the tail skirt and having it dig deep into the hard point on the back of her hips, she could hide her crotch, legs, and butt.

Connecting the skirts all the way to the bottom was a fashion style known as the “bell” and it was popular with non-student women, especially married ones.

Mitotsudaira only had to connect them about halfway down her thighs.

...From there, I just have to change.

She first lifted up the side skirts and stuck her hands to the front of her hips below the fabric.

And below the skirt, she removed the clasps attached to the top left and right of her inner suit’s panties section.

That let the front of the panties section dangle down between her legs, but she ignored that and rolled up her sleeves so they would not touch the floor.

“...Nn.”

She stuck her fingers into the top of her tights and lowered them all at once.

She had known they would be changing today, so she wore a supporter below the inner suit. The trick to keeping the strings from being pushed down was to

attach them to the hard points and wrap them around her hips.

...I generally don't wear one, though.

Married women generally saw underwear as a necessity, but she usually only wore a set of pads within the tights.

...The recent ones are really well made, so they don't shift out of place even with the inner suit pushing at them from above.

Yes, and the top is the same. Because I have a combat role, I wear something with some thickness in the chest for shock absorption. Yes, that is only natural for a knight and is certainly not about my personal pride at all...!

She made that silent excuse while removing the tights. Released from the insulation of the tights, she felt a ticklish chilly sensation between her legs. She knew that was the spring air, and...

“Now, then.”

She began to put on her track suit tights.

But just as she did...

“Copying my foolish brother: reverse edition!!”

Behind her, Kimi did what Mitotsudaira had done yesterday, but in reverse.

The night before, she had flipped up Asama’s yukata in Suzu’s bathhouse.

As the reverse of that, Kimi did not just pull down Mitotsudaira’s skirt but removed it from the hard points altogether. And that disconnected the underwear below as well.

The skirt’s connections came apart and the underwear fell down.

“—————”

Asama saw the girls silently speed up their changing after hearing a loud scream.

Naruze alone commented while changing.

“Oh, I see. So it looks like that when she’s only wearing the top...”

She continued sketching, but that was normal. That said...

...Should I call this “lively” or what?

“Wh-what are you doing, Kimi!? This is the classroom!”

“Understood. I’ll strip too, so bear with it! Isn’t this great!? Here, can’t you feel these clever cushions pressing against your back? Well? Well? You can tell I’ve stripped, can’t you?”

“I thought the humiliation wouldn’t start until we got to the measurements!”

It was all far too normal for them.

At any rate, Asama knew she had to get changed while Kimi was focused on a different target.

She had already changed the bottom. In her case, she wore a track suit with the red and white colors of a shrine maiden. It was from the Shirasago Brand that the Asama Shrine belonged to.

She began changing the top.

The inner suit could be worn as-is just like a shirt. If gym class involved some more vigorous activity, she could change out of the inner suit along with the track suit, but that would not be necessary today. Using a deodorant and purification spell through the hard point parts would be enough to clean it.

She had to remove her top and...

...Fold it.

It might be overly diligent to do that while changing. Heidi and Adele just placed theirs over a chair back after removing it.

It was likely due to the events and mindset of the past few days that she was noticing her diligence here.

She noticed Masazumi also placed hers over her chair. But...

...The way she does it seems more boyish somehow.

It was like a scene in a TV drama where a guy returned from work and placed his coat on the sofa. Did it only look that way because she crossdressed?

"Masazumi is wearing a different pair of underwear again," said Naruze behind Asama. "Ever since she transferred in, she's always wearing different underwear when we change. Is this an unexpected way to maintain her 'girly' side?"

Should I report this?

But standing here holding her folded top would change nothing. She placed it on her desk alongside her skirt. Then she removed the chest band from the side hard point parts and also removed the parts holding the chest band in place.

The collar parts kept the neck airtight, but she removed them here.

She did not forget to place a purification charm on them. That seemed excessive when she had only worn them since morning, but from an ether perspective, they were something she had "removed and set down". For someone from the Asama Shrine, it was less about physical dirtiness and more about preventing impurities introduced by the situation.

But a divine protection version of these charms was periodically distributed free of charge to anyone with an Asama Shrine contract. So...

"Does anyone need a purification charm?"

"Oh, I'll take one."

While receiving a serious lecture from Mitotsudaira, Kimi turned toward Asama with a smile. Past her, Mitotsudaira clenched her fists and protested.

"A-are you trying to escape!? ...Oh, and yes! I'll take one, too!"

"Yes, yes. And, Mito, you should probably put your tights on soon."

Mitotsudaira quickly continued changing while Asama opened a sign frame and checked a distribution list for purification divine protections. As Technohexen, Naito and Naruze were contracted with Musashi rather than the Asama Shrine. Heidi's main shrine was the Inari Shrine, so she was not on the list. They all had their own methods.

Masazumi's name on the list was a recent development.

Asama checked the list for everyone who raised their hand, including Masazumi, and sent out the appropriate divine protection version for each one.

"Okay, you can use it by setting it up from your hard point parts."

There was no physical charm and the effects would end if the clothing was moved, but they all placed the same divine protection as Asama on their removed clothing.

While they began setting things up, Asama put on her track suit top. It used a Western collar and thus did not require the neck hard points, but she did not really like that type. However...

...A stage costume might include a Western suit or dress.

It was important not to throw out any interest she had. And with that in mind...

"Hee hee."

She found it wonderful how her thoughts just assumed she would be performing on stage with a band. Just how much was she looking forward to that future?

"...Heidi-san, Asama-san just started laughing."

"...I've heard any memories that make you laugh like that are usually sexual in nature! C'mon, Adele, could you go ask her what this is about? I'll give you a cut of the profits!"

The frightening part about Adele and Heidi's conversation was that they did not have a problem with speaking loud enough for her to hear. But she smiled bitterly when she realized she was excited enough for other people to tell.

I need to pull it together.

Right, right, she told herself before suppressing the smile and attaching a chest cloth to the inside of her side hard points so it would hold her chest in place from above in place of the uniform's chest band.

The bottom was cut just below the chest and it tickled her breasts, but there was no avoiding that.

The physical examination here also included some strength testing, so it was important to be able to easily remove the clothing while also being able to move around a bit in it.

...Well, I won't have to use my body too much today.

They would probably only do grip strength, back muscles, and flexibility today.

I wonder how I'll do compared to last year, she thought, while...

"Kimi, Mito, are you done changing?"

"I will be soon."

"Me too."

Mitotsudaira was wearing a track suit colored the Hexagone Blue seen in Hexagone Française's uniforms. Kimi wore a white track suit with a bit of yellow in it.

A lot of students wore track suits in colors other than the official Musashi Blue, but these two stood out due to their hair color or behavior. However, in their class...

"Heidi...what is that?"

Heidi wore a gold track suit that matched Shirojiro's and, rather than "stand out", it was completely insane. Last year, they had worn silver lamé made from silver coins, but that had been dangerous when they were hit during an event, so they were simply made to look gold this year.

Naruze's was white with green lines and Naito's was black with orange lines.

But everyone was focused on one thing in particular.

"Suzu-san..."

Suzu's track suit.

"Yes."

Kimi looked away from Asama and toward Suzu.

Suzu had finished changing at her seat by the hallway. She had just reached for her desk to grab the paperwork carried to her.

But she looked over in confusion when she heard Asama's voice.

"You've retailored that, haven't you?" asked Kimi. "Could you let us see?"

"Eh?"

Suzu turned toward them and lightly raised her hands.

She was blushing, but from more than just the attention.

"You retailored it because your new one, which you had just made for the second year, was tight in the shoulders last week, right? Twist your body and let me see."

"L-like this?"

Suzu looked their way and twisted around to show herself off.

It looked like she was wearing a standard track suit, but it was not.

"I can't believe you tailored that yourself," said Adele. "That's kind of amazing."

"Not just that," said Naomasa who chose not to wear the coat. The corners of her mouth rose a little. "My team has some people into the latest fashions, and having the sleeves a little puffy is fashionable now due to influence from Europe. Suzu, you did that too, didn't you?"

"Yes. I-I did it while...I was fixing the...shoulders."

"Oh?" said Asama while glancing over toward Kimi. Most likely, Suzu had not measured her size wrong.

"Suzu-san must be growing taller," silently said Asama via eye contact.

"I think some other parts are gradually changing too," replied Kimi in the same way.

Suzu was slowly growing into an adult. *We all are*, thought Kimi. *Although...*

"K-Kimi-san!" protested Adele. "Why did you just give me a look of pity!?"

There were some exceptions.

Regardless, Suzu smiled a little, turned back around, and raised her altered sleeves.

"Nn. D-does it look...weird?"

"No, no!"

They all shook their heads.

Everyone knew how skilled Suzu was. Part of that was because her mother had taught her, but her patient and thorough personality allowed her to properly make each of the many parts for their uniforms. Ever since she started working at her family's bathhouse, she had started hearing the female customers talking about the latest trends, so she was the best of any of them at showing off those trends with her uniform and such.

They had all asked her to tailor something for them at some point.

Even now, Heidi gave nod.

"Could I get you to do that for mine?"

"Nn. Y-yes. It will take...some time, though."

"Judge. I'll make sure to pay you."

"Right."

Suzu nodded and Heidi nodded back with a smile.

...They understand each other.

Masazumi, however, did not understand them, so she looked over at Asama and asked a question, presumably about the divine protection.

"Asama, should I have paid for that?"

"Oh, no, no. Heidi's a merchant, you see."

"Right."

Suzu nodded and turned toward Heidi, so the merchant girl shrugged.

"A merchant will make sure to pay even between friends. After all, Shiro-kun and I are gathering a lot of attention for how young we are. It's getting to the point that Musashi's Commerce and Industry Guild is starting to deter us."

"Deter you?"

"That means they find us to be a nuisance. When the Hidden Dragon appeared yesterday, we took on the cargo waiting to be shipped out. Konishi-

sama and the others were hoping to use the commotion to make some money, but Shiro-kun used the harbor laws to prevent any of the cargo from being moved around.”

“So they’re keeping their eye on you...?”

Masazumi looked skeptical, but Kimi smiled a little.

“If they aren’t, it means they think you’re a ‘convenient small-timer’. Right, Heidi?”

Kimi could more or less imagine what the two merchants had done.

That was why she turned her smile toward Heidi and asked for confirmation.

“Since we were on the scene, you lied about us telling you it was dangerous and you used that to keep all the cargo in place, right? You are young merchants starting to make a name for yourselves, so Koni-tan and the others left you with the standby cargo so you couldn’t directly trade with Aki. That way they could show you they are on a higher level than you. But...”

“Judge. Konishi-sama and the others were trying to immediately ship their cargo to Aki to inflate its value, so stopping them was the only option for us. And if it stayed stopped, their deliveries would be delayed and they would completely lose face. Only a really lame merchant would use ‘I had to obey the harbor laws’ as an excuse.”

“So how much did you make them pay?”

“Judge.” Heidi smiled bitterly. “The cost of the loaded cargo...plus the inflated value...doubled.”

“You mean...?” Mitotsudaira put on a bitter smile just like Heidi. “So you demonstrated that that money was only pocket change for Konishi-sama and the others, right? You managed to warn them not to take you lightly while simultaneously allowing them to show off to Aki how successful a merchant they are.”

“Exactly. And thanks to that, we’re seen as small-timers who defy our superiors.”

Heidi’s expression showed she was not sure what to do about that, but she

was also smiling.

She was enjoying this. So...

"Yes, a merchant who's viewed as a small-timer can't exactly have Suzu doing her a 'favor'."

"Judge. To be blunt, I'd really like to pay a whole bunch of money to show I'm a merchant who will spare no expense for something truly incredible, but I know Suzu would just reject all that money."

"Yes. I-I couldn't possibly accept it."

"Hmm, but I wonder." Undeterred, Heidi smiled at Suzu and crouched down. She looked like she was about to scoot forward on her knees. "Given your character, Suzu, no one would complain if you did that. In fact, I think they would support you. How about it? Will you do it next time?"

"If I did...I would have to make...enough clothes to be...worth it."

But...

"I would like to...make enough for...everyone."

That was it.

Kimi was aware a breath of amusement escaped her mouth.

"It looks like it couldn't be exclusive for you, Heidi."

"I had a feeling," said the carefree merchant girl.

This is a nice atmosphere, thought Kimi as Masazumi looked at her and Heidi before sighing. She wondered what Masazumi was going to say.

"You all are incredible..."

"If you work at becoming a politician, you'll pull it off eventually."

"I hope you're right."

"That's what I wanted to hear. If you had said 'Are you sure?', I would have had to change my assessment of you."

Saying "I hope you're right" implied that she had a clear picture of that situation in her head.

But if she implied the opposite with “Are you sure?”, there was no hope. It would mean she did not have a clear picture of her dream. In that case...

“You will become one of us eventually.”

Did her foolish brother understand that?

He wanted to be a king, so did he understand that a future politician was so nearby?

...I'm not sure.

She had no intention of telling him. If he was going to be a king, he would have to notice it and make that politician an ally on his own. But if he needed some extra help at that point, she would give it to him.

Not lend it to him.

Give it to him.

After all, I am his big sister.

Just like Suzu and Heidi have their established relationship, I give him help.

I need no thanks. After all, a big sister is supposed to rejoice in her little brother's happiness.

If he does thank me, I'll probably laugh at how unnecessary it is. So...

“Don’t let a difficult future discourage you, future politician.”

“Judge.”

The reply was a little slow in coming, but it definitely came. And at that moment, Asama walked over from the right and tapped her on the shoulder.

“Come to think of it, Kimi, that reminds me of before.”

“Before? You mean this!?”

She pulled Asama’s track suit tights down to her knees and received a lecture much like before.

Chapter 3: Those with Too Much in the Measuring Room

第三章

『計り部屋の持て余し者ども』



いろいろあって
たくさんあって
あまってるというか
ええ
配点(変なことじゃないです)

There was so much

So very much

You could say it was too much

Yes

Point Allocation (Not Referring to Anything Weird)

“A mysterious phenomenon? You mean an ether stagnation? Over.”

On Okutama, “Musashi” asked that of “Okutama” along the road through the starboard nature park.

That road was known as Remorse Way. “Okutama” nodded below the faint shadows cast by the parasol of tree branches.

The two of them used gravitational control to keep cleaning supplies floating behind them.

“Judge. The Public Morals Committee and the Operations Committee are investigating, but we are receiving reports of an ether disturbance and witness accounts of what sounds like a mysterious phenomenon in my ship’s underground. Upon confirmation, I plan to have the region cleaned, but what do you think? Over.”

“That would depend on the cleaning method. Over.”

“Musashi” had more to say while she used a few hovering brooms to sweep out the ditch between the road and the sidewalk.

“Will it be Dynamic Washing in which a stream of purified water is used to wash the affected area clean?

“Will it be Dynamic Burning in which the affected area is burned away?

“Will it be Dynamic Purging in which the affected area and the neighboring areas are purged from the ship?

“Will it be Dynamic Self-Destruction in which the entire ship is destroyed?

“Now, which were you planning to use? Over.”

"I always have to wonder: why are they all called 'dynamic' and who came up with those ideas? Over."

"Judge. I believe it was Lord Motonobu. Over."

"Okutama" gave a nod of understanding and dropped the ditch garbage into the drain. She then heard the voice of a black algae creature from below.

"Water?"

"Judge. Very well. Over."

"Okutama" raised her right hand and something like a transparent rope flew up into the air from the woods to starboard.

It was water. It came from the seam between the edge of the woods and the adjacent residential district.

"The underground water pipes are also used to inspect the fire-fighting equipment. Over."

The flying stream shook as if resisting the urge to be released somewhere and it wrapped around the automaton's right arm.

"Now, then. Over."

She poured the water into the ditch.

"Yahoo." "We're flowing away." "Hydration."

"'Okutama', isn't that current too strong? Over."

"It is fine. Over."

Sure enough, water flew out from other areas. It looked like water was passing through the forest to reach her from the outer edge of the ship, but...

"I am still not used to pulling in water using gravitational control. Over."

"Then I have determined you should increase how often you clean. Over."

"But it takes an awful lot of time to check through the contents of Sakai-sama's black disks... Over."

"You leave me no choice." "Musashi" nodded. "Since you appear to be having trouble, I will personally take over Sakai-sama's day-to-day matters. Over."

“Are you saying you will check through his black disks, ‘Musashi’-sama!? Over.”

“Musashi” glared at “Okutama”.

“I am in charge of his day-to-day matters. Checking the black disks is your job. Over.”

“I had a feeling you would say that... Oh, ‘Musashi’-sama? That is a civilian-managed point. Over.”

“I count as a civilian on the Musashi. Over.”

With that, “Musashi” entered the woods. There was a small path of only a few meters through the grass.

“Horizon Ariadust’s memorial. ...That girl died in an accident on the very day we were officially rolled out. I have heard she was the child of Lord Motonobu and his common-law wife.”

“Musashi” pulled a bouquet from the supplies floating behind her.

She placed it on top of the memorial stone.

“All we understand is data. There are no remains here, so I have determined it only contains remorse and other related feelings. Over.”

“You do not understand emotions any more than the rest of us, ‘Musashi’-sama, so why are you leaving flowers here? Is it a custom? Over.”

“Musashi” nodded at that question from “Okutama”. And she spoke without looking back at the other automaton.

“If there were remains here, leaving flowers would indeed be the custom and tradition.”

Her line continued.

“But...”

But...

“What is this, since it has no remains and merely enshrines a name? Over.”

“I suppose it is meant to record that name and make that individual a part of

history.” “Okutama” dropped the water into the ditch and washed everything away. “By carving a stone with the name of someone who had emotions and lived their life, they can maintain things ‘the way they were’. The remains are no more than a guarantee. ...*The name carved in the stone* is less important than *the act of carving the name*. It allows the survivors to leave something ‘as it was’ since they have no other choice. Over.”

“In that case,” said “Musashi”. “I do not officially know this person. There is no one here to tell us about her. Sakai-sama would likely tell us if I asked, but I would feel virtual displeasure at giving him the upper hand like that. So...”

So...

“By leaving these flowers here, I am showing my understanding that the owner of this name was part of the Musashi’s crew. She was the princess who died on the day I was rolled out but who left her name here. Over.”

“‘Musashi’-sama? Over.”

“What is it? Over.”

“Judge.” “Okutama” put away the water and bowed toward “Musashi” who turned back toward her. “Do you know Aoi Toori-sama? Over.”

“How could I not? He broke my defense barriers just yesterday. Over.”

“I suppose so.” “Okutama” nodded. “He too knows the person whose name is carved there. Did you know this? This road is known as Remorse Way and he is known as its master even though he has not come here since the accident nine years ago. Over.”

“Okutama” spread her arms as she asked her question, so “Musashi” responded expressionlessly.

“I did know that. Over.”

In fact...

“Did you know this, ‘Okutama’? This is one of the few places where one can hold a meeting without Toori-sama interrupting. Over.”

“Eh? Is that so? ...Oh, is that why ‘Musashino’ and the others sometimes gather here for a bridge crew meeting? Over.”

“Musashi” nodded.

“I am speaking with you here now primarily because I wanted to confidentially confirm the information about an ether disturbance and a mysterious phenomenon in Okutama’s underground so soon after yesterday’s events. Over.”

“Is Toori-sama that much of a nuisance? Over.”

“Musashi” did not immediately respond and she moved her right hand through the air. She produced a few Far Eastern sickles and began cutting the nearby grass.

“Yesterday, when we were discussing how we should support Asama-sama and the others outside, Toori-sama opened an ether supply path via the Asama Shrine. Over.”

“Wasn’t that only enough for a single person? Over.”

“Something and nothing. Zero and nonzero. The difference between the two is incomparable. Our only excuse is to say we determined everything would be fine because ‘Okutama’ was out there. ...Toori-sama is a difficult person. If he does not visit here because he thinks the name carved here still exists, then...”

She looked to the flowers she had placed by the memorial.

“The fact that he reached the same conclusion as us is an extremely difficult thing. Helping humans is the automaton way of life, but how are we supposed to help someone who reaches the same conclusions as an automaton? ...That is a difficult question. Over.”

“Musashi” then returned to the road.

“When I come here next should I polish the stone or should I allow it to grow mossy? I need to ask Sakai-sama for some advice. Now, ‘Okutama’, to continue what we were discussing before: If you can delay it this long, it should be perfectly possible to deal with the ether disturbance in your ship’s underground. So what will you do? Over.”

“Oh, judge. I plan to ask an expert in this field. Over.”

“An expert? Over.”

“Judge.” “Okutama” pointed toward the center of the ship. “The Asama Shrine. Over.”

A certain question plagued Naruze each and every time.

...Although I don't think this is a question I'm supposed to ask.

“Why...?”

“Hm? What is it, Ga-chan?”

“Judge. ...Why do we have to have our chest size measured?”

Curtains were hung up in the art room for use as the measuring room. Their height, weight, sitting height, etc. were measured here. More than one class was measured at once, so their Class Plum was here with Sanyou's Class Bamboo.

Sanyou was in charge of taking measurements, but since that was too much to do on her own, she was focusing on measuring Class Bamboo's sitting height while everyone measured each other and wrote down the results for the rest.

Class Plum let the girls of Class Bamboo get started while doing their best to control Kimi. Then Class Plum began measuring shortly thereafter.

But since the chest measurement required removing their top, everyone put it off until last. That was why Naruze and Naito had decided to get started first because it took longer for winged species. However...

“It bothers me.”

“Hm? Is your shirt or stole catching on your wings?”

To keep their wings out when wearing a track suit, they would generally remove the sleeves of the shirt and keep the back open.

She was used to that, so having her wings out was not going to bother her now.

Margot had to know that. The smile on her face was carefree, so she was obviously just trying to get Naruze to explain. So...

“No. ...I don't understand the purpose of measuring our chests.”

"Ho ho? For example?"

"I mean, it doesn't make sense, does it? Even if I don't mind, you have to feel sorry for people like Ade-...for some people."

"Wh-what did you almost say just now!? I really didn't like the sound of that!"

"Don't worry about it," said Naruze as she pulled out a cloth measuring tape from the cloth laid out on the work desk.

"What do we accomplish by measuring how big our boobs are?"

She saw Sanyou give her a thumb's up from across the room, but she ignored it since that was too niche of a genre for use in a doujinshi. However...

"I mean, I would understand if it was measuring around your gut. There are some people who could die at any moment. Like Ohirosiki."

"Ohirosiki-dono! Wh-why did you just fall to your knees while building the festival stand!?"

"I-I just felt some kind of Technohexen attack to my heart! To my heart! Th-there is only one cure: the smile of a girl aged ten or younger! Now, hurry! Hurry and bring her here!"

"You're making me want to report you, so don't say anything more."

"You sure are cement-like, Nori-dono! Anyway, Toori-dono! Now is the time to crossdress into a girl age ten or younger!"

"Y-you can do that, Toori-kun!? You can make my dream come true!?"

"Hold on. Hold on, everyone. Give me a chance to hide my dick."

"You sure destroyed my dream in a hurry!?"

"There are a fair number of the boys like that," said Margot with a smile.

"Judge," agreed Naruze. "They also measure our butts, but I don't get that either. In Qing-Takeda, they have to look at the body's 'nature', so they might have to check the size of their pelvises, but we're the Far East. It's completely

meaningless to just have a giant ass like Asa...like some people."

"W-wait! You started to say something while looking at me, didn't you!? Didn't you!?"

"Don't worry about it." Naruze dodged the issue before continuing. "But the chest measurement is a true mystery. I thought the results would help with my drawings, but they wouldn't tell them to me."

"Well, that's personal information."

"Yeah, but I understand wanting something if it'll help sell your product."

It was nice to see the merchant was her usual self. But...

"We measure our lung capacity separately and we're not doing an M.H.R.R. Hapsburg-style measurement to determine the likely quality of breast milk production in the future, so it's completely pointless."

"Ga-chan, Ga-chan."

"What?"

"Judge." Margot removed her collar and removed her side hard points as well. Then she used her arms and the dangling cloth to hide her exposed breasts. "Can't you just think of it as an event that gives you an official excuse to touch the other person's boobs?"

"Hmm."

It was not like she was lacking in opportunities to touch Margot's boobs, but...

"I guess you're right."

Maybe being able to diligently take measurements with the cloth measuring tape really was nice, especially since she would get measured by Margot afterwards.

And behind her...

"W-wait, Kimi! You just slammed the measurer down on my head while measuring my sitting height, didn't you!?"

"Why complain when it gave you a shorter result?"

It was nice how lively they were.

Honestly, thought Mitotsudaira.

Her hair always became a problem when measuring her sitting height. Just like with a winged species, her hair would get in the way if she sat with her back to the measuring device. That meant she had to sit backwards, but Kimi was the one in charge of taking the measurements.

“C’mon, Mitotsudaira, move right up to the pole there. Good, good...your body fits real nicely up against it, doesn’t it?”

“Are you picking a fight with me!? You are, aren’t you!?”

She was holding the Cerberus in her hands for safety, but that left her with nothing to protect her from the measurer overhead.

Sitting height was surprisingly important. For fighters, that and the length of their legs determined the size of a lot of their equipment. And more than just inner suits and armor, it was true of handheld equipment too.

The length of your torso, the length of your arms, and the position of your joints influenced the weight balance of your weapon.

The longer your torso and arms, the greater your weapon’s reach and the higher the speed at its tip when you swung it. However, that also made it easier to damage your wrists and other joints.

The chest size that Naruze had been questioning was a factor when it came to inner suit size and material.

...Well, it’s not like either of them are going to join the Chancellor’s Officers...

The Chancellor’s Officers registered its members’ physical data so the Musashi could manage it. The automatons might order the equipment altered to match daily changes in their build.

That was not an issue for Mitotsudaira, though.

When she had her height measured just now, it had been a centimeter higher than last year, but that was within the margin of error. She remembered being

fairly tall in the past, but she was now just a bit above average among the girls.

As for her sitting height...

“Oh, dear, Mitotsudaira! You’ve grown five centimeters since last year! You’re a real grower!!”

“What idiot places the measurer on top of my hair decoration!?”

Mitotsudaira ignored Naomasa’s rational *tsukkomi* of “then remove it” and tilted her head instead. That allowed the measurer onto the center of her head.

“...It’s the same as last year.”

“Could you not make that sound like such a disappointment?”

Kimi gave a quick nod and let go of the measurer.

Her hair lifted the measurer up a bit.

Seeing that...

“...”

Kimi lowered the measurer again.

And she let go of it again.

“...”

She lowered it.

And let go.

It sprang up again.

She lowered it.

“Stop playing with my hair!!”

“Wait, Mitotsudaira. Strip off your tights. I didn’t check before if you have such incredible hair down there.”

“Just so you know, Loup-Garous and other quadrupedal beastmen have soft hair on their belly side.”

“Time out.”

Kimi touched the hair on the back of Mitotsudaira’s head and then the hair on

the front. She touched them twice. And...

“Amazing!”

She called Adele over. Kimi whispered in her ear and Adele nodded a little before touching her hair too.

“That is amazing!”

They called Asama over.

“That’s amazing...!”

It isn’t that impressive, thought Mitotsudaira, but then Kimi touched her bangs again. And...

“So your so-called ‘lower field’ is this hard...!”

“The hair on my head is mostly the same as the back-side hair, even on the forehead!! And what are you saying is so amazing!?”

“Oh.” Asama clapped her hands together with a smile. “Hee hee. That’s right, isn’t it? If it was like this, you wouldn’t be able to wear anything down there, would you?”

“Tomo, please spare me one of your usual inept attempts at helping...”

“But isn’t that great, Mitotsudaira?”

Mitotsudaira warily looked up at Kimi. She matched the tilt of the head made by the Cerberus in her hands.

“What is great?”

“Well. I was just about to give my foolish brother some inaccurate information.”

“Wh-what!? Please don’t give him any weird information!”

“Um, Extra Special Duty Officer, are you saying it would be okay if the information were accurate?”

She turned to face Adele and Adele stepped back with a shriek. The look in her eyes must have been quite sharp.

She had to calm down. At any rate, she stepped away from the measuring

device.

“Hurry up and measure my chest, Kimi.”

“Very well. Here, raise your arms...ah! What is this!? There must be something wrong with this measuring tape, Mitotsudaira! This says you’ve grown fifteen centimeters since last year!”

“I haven’t removed my top yet and I still have the side hard point parts on!”

“Then hurry up and strip. Come here, Troiko~”

“I am not giving you him.”

With the sitting height done, the Cerberus was back in its spot on her head.

And...

“...!”

The Cerberus barked at Kimi.

Feeling like she really was the Cerberus’s master, Mitotsudaira removed her side parts and removed the shirt collar from her neck. Even if she did not remove her top, she just had to allow the measuring tape around her sides.

“All done, Kimi.”

“Okay.”

And as soon as Kimi casually wrapped the cloth measuring tape around...

“Kh.”

It tightened down enough to force the air from her lungs. And once it loosened...

“Um... Oh, dear. I would feel bad reading off this number.”

“Y-you just tightened it so much it dug in, didn’t you!? That would have measured my skeleton more than anything! Besides, there’s no way I’ve shrunk by seven centimeters since last year!”

“The body is a mysterious thing.”

She wanted to flip over the work table, but she restrained herself.

In front of her, Kimi started playing around by tangling the measuring tape around herself, but then her face suddenly grew deadly serious.

“Mitotsudaira.”

“What?”

“Judge. Listen. The regulations technically allow you to be measured with your inner suit on. There are some people who find the measuring tape too dirty to be measured bare. Then there are those like Asama who are so large that merely wrapping the measuring tape around changes their shape, so they need to be held in place by something to get an accurate result.”

“Wh-what are you talking about, Kimi!? I do it bare! I always do it bare!”

Naruze had a sudden and explosive nosebleed and Sanyou noticed.

“U-um, all of you! Naruze-san is having trouble!”

“Eh?”

Naito, Asama, and Kimi turned around and Sanyou’s face clouded over upon seeing their breasts.

And Sanyou came to a stop.

“Y-yes...”

“S-Sensei!” said Mitotsudaira. “Why does that sudden depression seem awfully familiar!?”

“Oh, yes. If anything, you’re just like me, Mitotsudaira-san... And I was just about to feel all alone. Oh, and Adele-san is here too. ...Although Adele-san is even more...yes.”

“Calm down! Calm down, Sensei! Don’t forget your original objective!!”

“And, Sensei! What was that deep nod for when you looked at me!?”

Sanyou sat in her chair, held her knees together, and stared at the curtains covering the window. The way she would occasionally rock back and forth seemed dangerous, but there was nothing to do but leave her be.

That meant Sanyou was useless, but they managed to heal Naruze relatively quickly. Naito immediately used a spell and Asama used some purification to

tune away the blood. After that...

"So what was that about inner suits, Kimi?"

"Why not wear yours while you get measured?"

"What good is that kind of vanity now?"

"Then I'll measure them bare, but use a lewd method."

The idiot sister touched her breasts with somewhat cold hands.

"Nn."

"Heh heh. Looks like you enjoyed that. You reacted nicely. ...Now I'll take the top measurement."

"W-wait just a second! That is a biological reaction!"

"Yeah, that does tend to happen with the measuring tape tickling them. ...Oh, Ga-chan, you're bleeding all over the place again. Want to take a break?"

The Technohexen seemed to be having trouble too. But...

...Eh?

Kimi narrowed her eyes, began humming, and pulled the cloth measuring tape to either side as if to cross between her hands and chest. It was almost like she was moving to embrace Mitotsudaira.

"Take this. Secret Technique: Hug Measurement...!"

Asama ignored Mitotsudaira's muffled scream and placed the measuring tape on Suzu's body.

She worked at measuring while feeling the cloth loosen and tighten from Suzu's anxious breaths.

"Suzu-san, you've grown taller since last year. ...And your sitting height hasn't changed, so you're just getting cooler and cooler."

"Th-thank...you. B-but..." Suzu lifted her shirt collar back into place and blushed. "It's still not...as much as you or...Kimi-chan."

"Hee hee. Just make sure you get plenty to eat and you'll be fine."

"Th-then do I have no hope at all!?" shouted Adele. "That means my impoverished lifestyle can't get me a sexy adult body!"

"Adele, shouting something like that will do direct damage to Sanyou-sensei who uses her salary to eat properly."

Sanyou's upper body had collapsed onto the table and she had started singing a strange "loo loo loo" song, but they ignored her. However, Kimi tilted her head.

"Asama, doesn't that mean there are some cases where eating properly isn't enough?"

"But there's no hope if you don't eat properly."

"Th-then I'm completely hopeless!?"

Asama was starting to feel like everything she said would cause some kind of problem. So...

"I think worrying about it will only make them smaller. Due to the stress and wasted stamina."

"Oh, you have a point."

Adele quieted down, so Asama finished measuring Suzu. *Her waist is...ohh, quite slim! And her hips...ah, she's got a fair bit there.*

"W-well...?"

"You're very feminine. In a few more years, you'll be turning a lot of heads."

"R-really...?"



"Judge," confirmed Asama before having Suzu measure her. Suzu used a large measuring tape because the scale was printed such that Suzu could read it with her fingers.

Asama laughed a little at the ticklishness and the odd sense of calm at having a trustworthy person lightly restraining her like this.

"Ah, laugh and...y-you'll have a...bigger result."

Adele suddenly started laughing at the top of her lungs, earning her a karate chop from Naomasa's prosthetic arm.

But, thought Asama as she belatedly focused on her recent life. With the Gagaku Festival, the band, and the Hidden Dragon slaying, there was a lot going on, but...

...I'm glad everyone's the same as ever.

Then Suzu started making oddly quizzical breaths behind her while loosening and tightening the measuring tape.

I wonder why? thought Asama as some more of the ticklish sensation arrived.

"Suzu-san? Um, what is it?"

"Eh? U-um..."

Suzu retightened the measuring tape, causing it to press against the front of Asama's chest.

"Just a...slightly different angle...makes a l-large...difference. Wh-what do I do? ...Sh-should I lift them...up? Or should I...bind them...horizontally?"

"U-umm..." Asama asked Suzu a question. "H-how did we do it last year?"

"Heh heh. There was too much of a commotion to do the measuring last year, so we finished it up real quick with a spell," said Kimi. "But we wanted some proper measurements afterwards, so you, Mitotsudaira, and I did each other at your house while having a snack party."

"You did each other...!"

Naruze fell to her knees, but they just left her there.

"Tomo's breasts are so big that you have to worry about their weight and

softness, so the angle can change their shape quite a bit..."

Unsurprisingly, the girl who groped them was knowledgeable on the subject. And in that case...

"Just measure along the top line."

"Okay," said as Suzu as she started measuring, but Kimi smiled bitterly.

"It's because you have a solid core, but you're soft on the outside."

"Let's not link our personalities to our body types."

Asama said that with a bitter smile of her own, but Naruze tilted her head after recovering.

"On that subject, why is one end of the spectrum 'flat' and the other 'large'?"

"Eh?"

Everyone fell silent. But...

...That is a good question.

"Do you not know, Naruze? I would think you use those terms a lot in your doujinshis."

"You must not read them much. In the things I draw, the measurements tend to be on a spectrum from 'long' to 'short'!"

"Wow, now I really want to report you."

Kimi then looked to Naruze and tilted her head.

"I read one that my foolish brother had before. You're referring to hair length, aren't you?"

Hearing that, Asama thought for a bit. And she realized what this conversation must have meant.

"...Eh?"

That syllable of confusion caused everyone to glare at her. So...

"Y-yes, hair! Of course we were talking about hair! I totally knew that! No need to doubt me! Ah ha ha ha!"

"Heh heh heh. You just don't know when to give up, do you? But let's just leave it at that. ...Oh."

"Eh?"

"It seems we have a visitor."

When Kimi said that with another tilt of her head, everyone covered their chests and closed their tops before looking to the entrance.

The door slid open and someone stuck their head in to look around.

"Hey, are Asama and the others here? ...Huh? Mitsuki, what are you doing?"

It was Oriotorai. And once she spotted Asama...

"Oh, there you are. Could you quit measuring, grab a few other people, and come on out?"

"Huh? What for?"

"Judge. An official request from the Asama Shrine should be coming in soon, but a mysterious phenomenon has shown up underground here. They apparently want you to purify it. Okay?"

Oriotorai held up her right hand to beg her.

"I'll be heading down to move everyone out of the gym, so can you do that?"

Chapter 4: Deliberators Before the Darkness

第四章

『暗がり前の思案者達』



The things found in dark places

Are not good things

They are simply hidden things

Point Allocation (Is that a euphemism...?)

The talented are always in demand, thought Neshinbara.

...As a future author, so many people request my talent even during the festival preparations.

This demand, and thus the task that only he could accomplish, was...

“Do the lettering for an event’s hanging banner.”

A thick Far Eastern brush was soaked with neon pink ink. And with that...

“...Nhn!”

He felt the characters he produced were truly excellent and he quickly filled the 5m hanging banner.

...You know you did a good job when you splattered ink everywhere! Right!?

“...Okay!”

He had also been asked to make an abbreviated version, so he prepared to move over to a shorter banner.

“Shaaahh!!”

He twisted his body as he leaped and then landed. He wobbled around in a circle, but that was within acceptable bounds. And then...

“Uraaaahh!!”

The brush and his body raced out.

While he wrote out the name, an event committee member monitored a stopwatch sign frame for some reason and then raised a white flag in his right hand.

“Judge. That’ll do.”

“...Is this some kind of competition?”

“No, one of the conditions for writing it was to ‘not hesitate’.”

“And if I broke that rule?”

“The regulations count that as misrepresentation of skill, so you would be kicked out and the word ‘loser’ would be written on your stomach with ink that cannot be erased for a full year.”

That was a frightening rule. But when he looked back at his results...

“Wonderful. My talent scares me sometimes.”

The banner was for...

“A doujinshi event given the difficult theme of placing sympathy, empathy, and excellence at the foundation of politics in this wild Warring States period: The Party for Promoting Sympathy, Empathy, and Excellence.”

The abbreviated version was written on the next banner over.

“The SEX Party...”

That's perfect, thought Neshinbara before he noticed something.

Outside the academy, a group of mostly boys were putting together festival stands and carrying materials around, but...

“Where is ‘Okutama’-kun leading Asama-kun and the others?”

Asama looked back and saw Neshinbara waving at them from across the road. The hanging banner he had presumably written had just been lifted up.

Asama and the others all saw it.

“...”

“Hey, what’s the matter!? Won’t you come over here to talk with me!?”

Naruze’s response was immediate.

“You’re the worst.”

“Wh-what was that for!?”

"Place your hand on your chest and think long and hard about it. Oh, and I wasn't talking to you there, Mito."

"P-please wait! There's been some kind of misunderstanding!"

"Heh heh. If you want to know what happened, you should probably look to your own chest and ask there! Oh, and I wasn't talking to you, Mitotsudaira."

"I haven't said anything, so why am I being treated like this!?" protested Mitotsudaira.

"Now, now," said Asama while patting the silver wolf's shoulders to calm her down.

Regardless, it was probably best to let Neshinbara know what they were doing. He was in contact with Toori and the others, so this meant the actions of the Class Plum girls would definitely be passed on to the boys.

So...

"We've found something I need to shoot, so we're on our way to the Asama Shrine to get my equipment."

Hearing that, all of the people working in the area fell silent and turned their way.

And...

"Huh? Huh? Why are you all slowly backing away? It's okay. I promise. I won't shoot you unless you have some kind of weird impurity."

"Come to think of it, you're technically a dragon slayer now, aren't you?"

"So are the rest of you. And you did the most work there, Mito."

"The announcement said it was done by a representative of the Asama Shrine," explained Mitotsudaira. "So along with the Non-God Sword the day before last, that firepower was your first serious diplomatic debut, Asama."

"W-wait! I take issue with that! And what do you mean 'serious'!? You make it sound like my previous firepower was only a 'so-so' diplomatic debut!"

Hearing that, everyone took about two steps back. Then they formed a scrum. After about two minutes of conversation, Adele raised her right hand.

"Back in middle school, you shot down a flying dragon chasing an Asama Shrine dove, didn't you? Hexagone Française had been working really hard to hunt down that dragon."

"No, that was, um...I think I just got a lucky shot. I was really surprised when he fell down, so I gave him a major scolding and let him go."

"I see," said Adele as she lowered her hand, but Mitotsudaira raised hers instead.

"Um, last year on Murayama, yes, in the underground area on the edge where my land is? Well, remember when a fuel leak started a fire in the transport district there, but you converted your firepower to purge the entire blazing wide block from the ship?"

"Well, that was with the support of the Asama Shrine. My shot was only the catalyst for the conversion. A-and the transport district wide blocks are just empty floors with no homes on them, so it was actually pretty easy to...no, I mean it was still quite difficult even if it was just a floor."

Kimi raised her hand.

"Don't you just tend to shoot things a lot?"

The scary part was how she found herself unable to deny it. But...

"B-but my Shinto jobs involve Gagaku or ritual prayers far more often. Compared to the purifications I do every morning, every night, and with every single job, I don't fire my bow all that often, do I?"

"No one would let you get away with firing that thing every morning and every night."

That did seem true. And in that sense...

...Oh, if the Gagaku Festival had only been a few days earlier, my diplomatic debut as a band shrine maiden would have come first...

But reality rarely went the way you wanted. Even now, a sign frame opened, showing Heidi who had returned to their classroom.

"I've been gathering some information from outside, but K.P.A. Italia is broadcasting all sorts of excuses to dodge responsibility for what happened

yesterday. To show how dangerous a presence Musashi is, they've been saying things like, 'The wicked dragon was repelled by the main force of Musashi's Asama Shrine: the Dragon-Slayer Shrine Maiden.' Look, there's even a Western version of you laughing drawn in the Italian comic style."

"Couldn't they take a lesson from the neighboring *Bandes Dessinées* and draw some cleaner lines?"

Naruze glared at the drawing and her criticism was hard to deny. Asama had trouble accepting a drawing of herself where she looked thirty and was covered in muscles. Her father even sent his opinion over the experimental divine chat.

Asama Father: "This is unacceptable! I'm going to contact them via Aki!"

Um, dad, fixing the art doesn't fix the fundamental problem. And I'm not sure I want your screenname to be based on me.

But that aside...

"Well, if they'll make the Musashi sound powerful, it can both help us and hurt us. The diplomats will just have to do their best to make sure it helps us."

"Hee hee. That's a lot like the Shinto idea of purification."

"I guess I can't really argue with that..."

If she started performing in a band, how would it influence people's image of her?

"Asama certainly is famous. Is that due to the Asama Shrine?"

Masazumi had returned to Class 2-Plum's classroom after finishing with the measurements and she spoke to Heidi who was starting work on a few sign frames.

But...

"Wait just a moment, okay? Shiro-kun and I have some things in Okutama's underground, so I want to protect it from what's about to happen before any of the other merchants can do the same." Heidi had her wait.

Of course, Masazumi appreciated Heidi's behavior.

This meant someone nearby was already starting to work at a professional level. Given Masazumi's own position, that was reassuring, but also...

...I need to work harder.

It was like a rebuke or a reminder to do better. But...

"I can't just say I'll do better later," she said quietly.

Your path through life was not something you would start on later. It was something you had already begun.

She hoped to become a politician, so she was reading books, collecting information about the world, gathering her thoughts, and storing it all inside her. That may be akin to child's play to a professional or expert.

After all, some of her peers were already going out there and working. But...

...It means I've already started.

Those who were heading out there could contact the real deal.

Meanwhile, those who were not heading out there could *only* contact what was not real.

But even so, there was no rule saying it was wrong to contact that which was not real.

...No.

It isn't accurate to say what I'm doing "isn't real", thought Masazumi.

The political science books she read were feedback from the people working in the field. If reading those things would help her understand the real deal and provide her with a starting point...

...It isn't what's "real" that I haven't reached yet.

If she had to describe it...

"As I am, I can't learn what exists at 'a higher level'."

She may have only been explaining away her own cowardice, but it would be better to view it like this. Otherwise, she would never go beyond reading those political science books and criticizing the people doing the actual work.

She did not want to be a commentator.

She wanted to be someone who made a difference in the world. So...

“Okay, Masazumi. What was it?”

“Eh? O-oh, right.”

Masazumi focused outwards again and looked to Heidi. She tilted her head just like the white fox on the girl’s head.

“So about what you were saying. Just how famous is Asa-...”

She started to ask how famous Asama was in the other nations, but she changed her mind.

“Just how famous is everyone?”

“Not as famous as the third year officers. They get put in white papers and almanacs.”

“What about you, Heidi?”

“Judge.” Heidi smiled back. “Shiro-kun and I are seen as Musashi international trade merchants...but only at the second year level. If we haven’t improved our standing by the time we enter the third year, we’ll have to go for a get rich quick scheme.”

“Really?”

“Judge. But we’re not going to stop at being merchants within Musashi. We want far more money than that.”

Masazumi did not quite understand their values, but that was apparently how it was. However...

“The most famous one would be Azuma-kun, although he’s not with us at the moment. He’s the imperial crown prince. To be honest, there was a time when it felt like Class Plum’s reputation was singlehandedly supported by him.”

Masazumi had yet to see him, but she knew about him.

“I hear he’s currently in Kyoto, preparing for secular life.”

“Yes, yes. They say he could be the source of some conflict over succession

since the emperor is unaging. So to keep him as far away from the Shinto emperor as possible, they're having him join the Buddhists and also start a secular life. Meanwhile, the Far East is fighting back by strengthening the syncretism of Shinto and Buddhism. ...Thanks to that, there's a divine transmission fan community called the Azuma Lovers and they'll pay a lot for secret photos of him."

But...

"Azuma-kun is starting to make a name for himself as an individual, so the reputation of Class Plum as a whole has been gradually dropping. Nowadays, we're known – at best – as the crown prince's class. ...It looks like we'll have to work individually to get our name out there."

"We'll have to work *individually*...to get *our* name out there?"

That was a weird phrasing. She understood what it meant, but it still felt contradictory. Heidi smiled bitterly when she pointed it out.

And she explained.

"Not even I should really be mentioning this."

But...

"Masazumi, if you do become a politician, then our class can provide you with the most important thing you could ask for."

"Funding?"

"No, no."

"Connections?"

"No, no."

"Then..."

"Not that either."

Heidi sat on the desk and smiled.

"You're only looking at your hands. You won't find the answer there."

You see...

"Can you become a politician with funding and connections? Well, you're not one yet, so I guess you wouldn't know. So I'll answer as a merchant. ...So can you become a merchant with funding and connections?"

Well...

"You can."

"-----"

"But...that says nothing about whether you can remain a *good* merchant for very long."

"You mean...?"

"I'm not talking about some kind of idealism. But it's not a physical 'thing' either. Sales are found through trust. So instead of a 'thing' you can hold in your hand, you need..."

Heidi held out her hand with the palm up.

...*Oh.*

"I'm not paying you."

"But it's some really good information. It's a trick you'll definitely need to succeed as a politician."

"And that's why I'm not paying you," said Masazumi. "A politician can't buy her trust from a merchant. ...I will become a politician who is valuable enough for the merchant to want to pay me. That is best."

"Oh." Heidi smiled. "So you won't become our 'thing'?"

Her smile became a sigh of relief.

"That's really good to hear."

"Judge."

I see, thought Masazumi.

...The people in this class are selective.

They would not become hers. They would not just let her have her way. She

was surrounded by people like that.

And if someone was careless enough to fall under their control...

...They would probably keep their distance or reject that person.

So...

"Are we a group of people who need each other but won't sacrifice ourselves for each other?"

"That information would be very expensive."

"Why?"

"We all know of a certain remorse that could not be saved. And a lot of it's on a subconscious level at this point, but Kimi-chan makes a pretty clear distinction about who isn't one of us and Mito seems to check to see who she can stand side-by-side with. However..."

However...

"I'm relieved that our future politician isn't someone who will completely understand us."

"Wouldn't it be more convenient if I was?"

"No, no. I mean, think about it. If we had a politician who understood us, she would listen to everything we said, but do you know what that means?" Heidi lightly kicked her legs as they dangled from the desk. "That politician would only ever enact the kind of economic policy that a mere merchant could think up. She'd be small-time."

"You sure are strict."

"Because I'm a merchant. I have that merchant-like strictness. And the others will of course go right ahead and ask for what they want. That's just the kind of class this is. Adele, Suzu, and the boys don't hesitate to ask for something if that person can actually do it. So," said the merchant girl. "If you need something, Masazumi, just put in an order."

"...Is that why Asama and the others left earlier?"

"Judge. That's right. ...I think I know what's going on here, but will they be

able to do this right?"

Asama invited everyone into her room to change clothes.

The room was about 15 square meters and it had not been touched since she, Kimi, and Mitotsudaira had woken up this morning. Their presence was still there.

"Oh, my. Just this one blanket is warm. What were you girls doing together...?"

"W-wait, Naruze! Stop digging through the folded futons."

"Heh heh heh. Do you want to know, Naruze!? We spent a hot night together with Asama sandwiched between Mitotsudaira and me! Then Asama told me she wanted to do it 'with you until morning'^[4], but I said that wasn't fair since it excluded Mitotsudaira. Then Asama said not to worry since 'Mito is already right there inside us' and Mitotsudaira said 'yes, I am inside both of you, aren't I?' Oh, they just looked so happy!!"

"Yeeeessssss!!"

"What was that cheer for, Naruze!?"

Should we really be making this much noise at the shrine? belatedly wondered Asama, but then she started to explain their strategy for today.

"I was caught off guard yesterday because I wasn't expecting an exciting event like a Hidden Dragon showing up. So we need to be properly prepared this time."

"Judge," they all agreed. Asama undid her inner suit and pulled her shrine maiden outfit from a wooden box she had carried in.

"For the most part, we will head out in shrine maiden uniforms. But this is a mission requested of the Asama Shrine instead of an investigation by the shrine, so I can say we hired you for the job."

"Then Margot and I would like some Technohexen secondary equipment."

"I...well, engine division equipment is surprisingly ill suited for combat," said

Naomasa. "I guess I'll head out in a shrine maiden uniform, too."

"So will I," said Mitotsudaira. "What about you, Kimi?"

"I'll use dancer equipment since it's more efficient for offerings."

Kimi opened the dresser's top drawer, much to Asama's surprise.

"Eh? Ah! Wait! Why are you going through my dresser!?"

Meanwhile, Kimi pulled out a white dancer's outfit.

There was little point in asking when that had gotten there. Kimi would occasionally work part-time here and she often came over to play. It was not all surprising that she had stored some spare clothing for when she spent the night. Or rather...

...She's completely outdone me here...

"Some of my foolish brother's clothes are stored here too, you know? Since he sometimes works as a part-time shrine maiden."

"W-wait just a second! My king changes in here!?"

"Eh?"

Asama was confused.

...I-is there anything wrong with that...?

As she wondered that, Asama somewhat hesitantly explained.

"W-well, you know. He c-can't exactly do it in the girls locker room or the boys locker room...right? I mean, he's crossdressing, right? Yes, Shinto has a lot of crossdressing material, so it's fine that he does it, but, but...oh, I know. There might be some people who would get turned on by it. ...That's the problem, yes. And this room is under my control. Oh, but that doesn't mean I'm watching. Besides, Toori-kun only uses it when I'm not here. I assume he gets the information from my dad. And afterwards...well, I'm a shrine maiden, right? So I purify it. Yes, so it's clean! Everything's perfectly clean! And there's no harm in the crossdressing! How about that!?"

She had started hanging her head at some point, but she raised it with that final question and found the others forming a scrum.

"Isn't that exactly like she's a...what would you call it? ...A mistress?"

"Who's the wife in this scenario?"

"I think we can definitely say she's been spoiling him too much."

"Judge. So this is why my king can't stop crossdressing..."

"Unfortunately, I think there's another reason for that."

"E-everyone...we need to...trust Asama...-san."

Oh, no. That's a lot of pressure, Suzu-san.

But Kimi, who had already stripped half-naked in order to change, placed her hands on her cheeks and shook her head in an obvious act.

"No! Asama has reached the point where she can't live on without my foolish brother and me! Oh, the Aoi blood is such a forbidden fruit! No family causes you more trouble!"

"That's not a good thing, Kimi."

"Anyway," said Mitotsudaira while raising her hand. "If my king only uses this room while Tomo isn't around, well, I guess that's fine."

Just then, the idiot opened the sliding door and tried to enter.

They all turned around.

"Huh?"

With a shrine maiden outfit in his arms, he tilted his head and shut the sliding door.

And through the door, they heard him walking down the hall.

"Hey! Asama's dad. They're in there! They haven't come out yet!"

After his voice faded into the distance, Asama glanced over at the others.

Everyone but Kimi was staring back at her with their mouths spread horizontally.

Then Naomasa raised her right hand and spoke.

"I think you should stand up to him a little more."

"Wh-what makes you think that!? B-besides, this proves I don't watch Toorikun change, doesn't it? This isn't a problem."

"She's hopeless..." a few of them muttered with drooping shoulders.

Was there something wrong with her if she did not see what they were so worried about? But...

"A-anyway, we were in the middle of our strategy meeting. ...Suzu-san."

"Oh, wh-what?"

"I want you to stay at the Asama Shrine as our backup."

"Back...attack?"

Everyone fell silent. It was Naruze who decided to ask.

"...Who would be doing that?"

"Just out of curiosity, who would be in the very back?" asked Mitotsudaira.
"Who would that be?"

As a bow-user, Asama would be the rear guard, so she raised her hand.

"W-wait a minute, Asama-san! Are you planning to blow us all away!?"

"Just to be clear, I didn't say anything weird during that scrum meeting."

"Masa! You're trying to protect yourself with that, aren't you!? Tomo! You need to be out at the very front this time!"

"That is certainly an unusual party formation!!"

More importantly, she had to correct Suzu. So she raised her right index finger.

"Suzu-san, what I want you to provide is backup. 'Okutama'-san, I also want you doing that from outside, so you send us instructions and advice."

"Instructions? Over."

"Yes. I noticed in the last battle that it's dangerous to have your only viewpoints be on the battlefield itself. It's safer to have someone who can monitor the overall movements, the actions of the enemy, and the ether and ley lines condition. And if things get too dangerous, you can purge the entire

area we're in. Also..."

Also...

"I was in charge of all that during the last battle, so it delayed my participation in the battle. Against an ether opponent like a Hidden Dragon, a shrine maiden with purification abilities will need to go through more preparation before joining in. And that can cause a critical delay. That's why I want to leave most of that with you instead."

She truly thought that.

Against a human opponent, a shrine maiden generally could not join the fight and could thus focus on backup. But she needed to stand on the front line when the opponent was a mysterious phenomenon.

"Mito said earlier I should be out in front, but that might actually be the right way of going about this."

"Then," said Kimi, who had already changed into her dancer outfit. "If you're in the lead, what kind of equipment are you going to give us all? And you immediately accepted when Sensei arrived with the request, but why was that? Spill the beans."

"Oh, yes. As for the equipment, you can use any level of official Shirasago products. None of it will be custom-made to fit you, but the grips and handles can be swapped out and the anchors are detachable, so feel free to use some if you're accustomed to them from class."

"Oh, I brought a practice lance, but can I get a divine protection charm for it?" asked Adele. "Charms are consumables, so I can't just borrow it and return it, can I?"

"As an Asama Shrine shrine maiden, you can use as much as you want as long as we don't go over the budget allotted for this mission."

"Ohh," said Adele, sounding quite impressed.

Asama then looked to Kimi and Mitotsudaira. Kimi nodded and Mitotsudaira tilted her head.

"Below the academy...or more accurately, in Okutama's underground area,

there is a Gagaku instrument storeroom managed by the Asama Shrine. But..."

"But? But what?"

"Well." Asama had meant to tell Kimi this earlier. "The official Gagaku instruments belong to the shrine, but since that storeroom is below the academy, it naturally includes instruments for students from different nations. ...Simply put, it contains a variety of modern instruments."

Her meaning seemed to get through to them. Mitotsudaira's expression lit up and the Cerberus barked on her head.

...Do they share their emotions?

It was not a Mouse, so maybe she was only imagining it. *There are some unknown things about that Cerberus*, thought Asama before saying more.

"Mito, you would probably know how to play Western instruments, and there should be some of those there."

"Oh, could we borrow some of those too?" asked Naito.

"To be blunt, Western instruments aren't used in Gagaku... We include the latest models just in case, but there isn't anyone to use them."

"Then you'll rent them out? Would twenty reserved copies of my doujinshi cover the rental fee?"

"That's based on me, isn't it!? And if they're reserved copies, does that mean I have to go to the event to pick them up!?"

"Don't worry about it," said Kimi with a smile while checking through the ear-shaped sensors for a shrine maiden and looking for one that would fit with Suzu's Noise Neighbor by repeatedly putting one on the girl and then removing it. "It's time we left...to prepare for the Gagaku Festival."

Afterword

That was Kimitoasamade 3-A. It starts the morning after 2-B, but things were as lively as ever with those three girls plus several more.

This was...yes, the physical examination was something I realized I had intended to write a while back but never got around to. And for the drama CD, I didn't even intend to write about it, much less actually write about it, so I went for all the material I hadn't done before. Or rather, I wish I had written this in the main story, but the timing and flow of things just never worked out. Life never goes the way you want it to, does it?

Anyway, things are progressing toward the Gagaku Festival, but this time I had them think about what comes next and what is normal for them while everyone begins their respective activities.

I feel like Naito and Naruze have it especially tough.

In this era, planning for your future was quite strict. Normal people would either continue the family business (generally the eldest son did this) or helped out with it (For the second son on down. They weren't allowed to marry until their family was prosperous because they had to be able to support the growing family).

To make sure that everyone but the eldest son didn't become "deadbeats", the eldest son had to work hard to keep the family going. Yet the eldest son wouldn't have all that much experience, so if he let his guard down the family could go out of business. And all the while, he would have to keep the family and his brothers together.

The standard style was for the eldest son to be in charge while the entire family worked to protect the generations-old family and their land.

You can see how the idea of the "family" was a lot more important than it is

now.

"Okay, this might be sudden, but did you do anything for your future while in high school?"

"I worked part-time cooking okonomiyaki at a truck that stopped at festivals in Ishikawa and Gifu prefectures every week."

"That's not about your future. It's day labor."

"The white truck's usual location was below an overpass in Takadanobaba."

"Oh, that's near an arcade, right? This is starting to get oddly realistic."

I wonder if things like that are still around. Hmm.

Anyway, the background music this time was Hate Made Mo. It's nice everyday background music, but I was more focused on the fact that it's a cheering song.

"Who was being cheered on the most?" I do wonder that, but I also think it's a mutual thing.

Okay, wait just a bit longer for 3-B.

August 2012. A morning before a summer manga festival.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ In this case, Kimitasamade is being interpreted as “By Kimi and Asama”.
2. ↑ “This night of blooming flowers” is pronounced the same as Konohana no Sakuya.
3. ↑ The second and third lines use an alternate interpretation of the kanji.
4. ↑ One interpretation of Kimitoasamade.